

SECOND EDITION

Rocky Mountain



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A Romance of Detective Work
on the Frontier.

BY COLONEL PRENTISS INGRAHAM,
AUTHOR OF "KENT KINGDON THE CARD KING,"
"PAWNEE BILL," "THE BUCKSKIN
ROVERS," "BUCK TAYLOR,"
ETC., ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I.

AN UNSEEN FOE.

A HORSEMAN was riding along a border trail in the Rocky Mountains.

He was a man whose face indicated all that was resolute and daring, yet full of an expression of nobility of soul.

Well mounted, he was thoroughly armed, and his costume was just what was needed for a wild life on the frontier.

"AM ON HIS TRAIL, AND HE CANNOT BE FAR AHEAD OF ME," THE OLD MAN
MUTTERED, LOOKING EARNESTLY AT THE FAINT TRAIL.

Suddenly there came a sharp, ringing sound, which once heard can never be mistaken for aught else—the crack of a rifle.

At the sound the horseman drew rein and a revolver at the same instant.

A moment more and he rode forward, as a cry came to his ears, and a scene met his gaze that caused him to hasten forward to aid a human being in dire danger and distress.

A man had fallen from his saddle by the roadside, and was writhing in agony, while his horse was dashing along, riderless, up the trail.

"Great God! why did you kill me, for I have received my death-wound? I never harmed you!"

Such was the wounded man's cry as the horseman rode up and sprung from his saddle.

"I kill you? Why, what do you mean?"

"Did you not fire on me from an ambush just now?"

"On my honor, no!"

"And you have not come to rob me?"

"My dear sir, I am no assassin or robber. I heard a shot as I rode along the trail, and then your cry, so spurred to your aid. Who fired the shot, Heaven only knows."

"True, the shot came from behind me, and you rode up from in front of me. Now I look at your face I see that I wronged you. Forgive me!—But, quick! look about for my assassin, or he will kill you, too," and the wounded man cast a hurried and anxious glance about him.

"But you need my aid, and—"

"I have my death-wound, and yet may live for hours, so hunt down that assassin ere he kills you; then come back to me."

The stricken man was calm now, and the horseman threw himself upon his horse, and, with revolver in hand, rode at a gallop along the trail in search of the secret foe.

The victim laid low was a man with beard and hair tinged with gray. He was tall of stature, wore buckskin clothing, much the worse for wear, and his boots and hat were full of holes.

He looked like a person who had been a long time away from civilization, yet one who had been well reared and had known a life of refinement and comfort in the past, whatever had been his motive for coming to the wilds of the frontier.

He was armed, but, not having seen any foe, his weapons were still in his belt.

The bullet had entered his side, and his livid face and hard-set teeth, with a moan now and then wrung from his lips by agony, showed how much he suffered.

And he suffered both mentally and physically it seemed.

In a short while the horseman came back.

He had made a circuit of the spot, but could find no foe.

"The clatter of your horse's hoofs frightened him away," said the wounded man; "but, I am glad you have come, for I have much to say to you before I die."

"I hope it is not so bad as that."

"It is, for I have received my death-wound."

"Let me examine it, for I know a little about surgery."

"And I know much, for I am, or was, a physician, and graduated in the best hospitals of Paris. The bullet has passed through my body, and I cannot live, so, as I have much to say to you before I die, I must talk now."

"The truth is, I squandered a fortune left to me, and the fortunes left in my keeping that belonged to others. I have caused untold misery in the world, and my crimes caused me to fly to the border for safety."

"I know by your face that you are not such as I am—that you are a man whom I can trust."

"I was gifted, and could have made my mark in the world, had I not thrown myself away."

"But I can only regret now, and try to atone."

"Your name, please?"

"Borden Branch, a wanderer for pleasure; one who prefers life among the solitudes of nature, risking its dangers, rather than dwell among heartless humanity."

The answer was a strange one, uttered with bitterness of tone.

It seemed to impress the dying man—for dying he was, and he said, earnestly:

"I will trust you."

CHAPTER II.

A SECRET AND A SHOT.

THAT the wounded man could not last very long was evident, for his face was becoming more and more death-like, and his breath was quick and hard.

Borden Branch made him as comfortable as possible, and then sat down to hear his story.

With a deep sigh the dying man asked:

"Are you a rich man?"

"I possess ample of this world's goods."

"Married?"

A painful look, but the answer was firmly, "No!"

"My name is Leonard Delorme, and as I said, I have defrauded many. There are certain ones, whose names you will find among papers which I will give you, whom I wish to repay. The amounts are opposite each name, with the interest that has accumulated to date, for I had arranged all but a few days ago and was upon my way to redeem the past when I met my death-wound."

"Among my papers you will find a map. It is a perfect one of a trail from Silver City to a mine which I discovered, and which has panned out a fortune."

"Find that trail, follow it and it will bring you to the mine. Then follow the directions on the map and you will discover a vast fortune in gold."

"That fortune is to be distributed as my directions indicate. Then there is a specified sum to be distributed among poor miners, and another amount to be given to certain charities."

"I had marked out all that to do myself; but death comes to me and you are my instrument sent by Heaven, for I trust you implicitly, and thank you for your help to me."

"I deserve no thanks for being honest toward a dying man," was the reply.

"There will be gold left—no mean sum—and that shall be my legacy to you, for it was to be mine when I had done my duty by others."

"I do not need your gold."

"That may be: still it is yours; and more, you will be to much trouble to carry out my wishes, and it will take much time; therefore, do not refuse the legacy."

"Very well."

"Now, take from my pocket a leather wallet which you will find there."

The man obeyed, and withdrawing the wallet was requested to open it.

Within it was a well-drawn map of a trail over some mountains far distant from the spot where the miner had met his death-wound.

Then there was a list of names, with addresses, with certain amounts opposite to each, and another list of sums to be devoted to various charities.

All was perfectly plain as to his wishes, and at a glance, Borden Branch understood all that was to be done.

"You understand?"

"Perfectly."

"And pledge yourself to carry out my wishes in full?"

"I do."

"I thank you. Now around my body is a belt of gold. Do not remove it at present, for the pain is too great to bear any movement. Wait until I am dead. Then find my horse, for I have some valuable things on him, with my weapons. Back at the mine you will find some provisions cached, ample to last for months, for I not long ago laid in a large supply, and afterward struck a rich vein of ore that panned out enough to let me at once start on the great work of making restitution for the past."

"Hark! there is the sound of hoofs."

The keen ears of the dying man had caught the sound, and Borden Branch brought his rifle round for use.

Soon there came into view a riderless horse, who neighed loudly as he saw the other animal and the two men in the trail.

"It is my horse. The faithful animal has returned to me."

The voice of the dying man was very weak, and Borden Branch saw that the end was near.

He caught the horse and threw the lariat over the horn of his own saddle, for he knew that his faithful steed would stand.

Then he returned to the dying man, to be startled at the change a minute or two had made.

He was unable to speak, and, in a moment, with a groan of anguish, breathed his last.

The body was then searched; a blanket taken from the dead man's saddle was wrapped about the form, and with a hatchet and knife that hung at his saddle horn he set to work and dug a grave between two rocks, some distance off the trail.

Into this the form was laid, at full length; then the traveler, with uncovered head repeated a part of the burial service over the dead, and with gentle hands, filled in the grave.

Poles were cut and placed between the rocks, to shield the grave from the wild animals, and

having completed his task, Borden Branch mounted his horse, and, with that of the dead man in lead, turned into the trail to continue on his way.

As he did so a shot rang out from an ambush, and the man fell forward on his saddle-horn.

CHAPTER III.

THE VAGABOND TRAILER.

A MAN was following a trail on foot, and leading his horse.

The man appeared to be in hard luck, for he was decidedly run down in clothing, shoe-wear, bat and general make-up.

His face was haggard and pinched, as with suffering from hunger, and his horse was a sorry-looking beast.

He carried an old-fashioned rifle, a revolver that had seen its best days, and a knife that most men would have thrown away.

"I am on his trail, and he cannot be far ahead of me," the man muttered, looking earnestly at the faint trail.

"I must overtake him, for to do so is to win fortune, to fail is to die, for I cannot keep up the struggle much longer."

"I have already gone through too much, more than most men would live under."

"If he takes the right hand trail at the stream yonder, then I can head him off in the mountains; but, if he goes to the left, I can only follow and strike him in camp."

"I must not fail in either event, for life and death to me are at the end of my trail."

So mused the man, and his face lighted up with a malignant look, as he uttered the words.

There was revenge in his heart surely, against the one he followed.

Mounting his horse, he urged him on at a rapid gait, and it required considerable urging, too.

Arriving at a stream, the one to which he had referred, he quenched his thirst, and gave his horse a chance to do likewise, and to crop a few mouthfuls of grass near by, while he on foot looked for the trail he had been following so persistently.

At last his face lighted up with a look of triumph.

The trail led to the right after crossing the stream.

"I can head him off at the mountains, yonder," he said, pointing toward a distant range, and, mounting his horse, he set forth at a pace which it was evident the animal would not be able to keep up very long.

But the man did not spare his horse, and went along over rough ways at the same rapid pace.

"I will head him off, for the ground was yet wet where his horse left the stream, showing that he was not far ahead of me."

"I must get there."

So he urged his horse onward once more, and at last he reached the base of the mountains.

But the animal could not ascend the steep grade.

He was utterly worn out, and his pace was a slow walk.

"I care not, for his horse will do," the man muttered, and dismounting, he turned his tired horse loose to wander where he willed.

Then on foot he began to ascend the steep trail, leading up the mountain, and which was evidently a deer path.

He seemed to know the locality, for he wandered off from the trail at certain points and met it again further up, thereby cutting off considerable distance.

At last he reached a well-defined trail leading along the ridge.

"He has not passed yet!"

He almost shouted the words, and then, as though fearful of having been heard, he shrunk back behind some rocks.

The ridge was a rugged one, with rocks here and there of vast size, a few large pines and clumps of small trees.

Seeking a hiding-place, the man began to rest, and endeavor to calm himself as best he could.

His hard ride across the plains, his rapid climb of the mountain, had tired him out, and then, too, his mission there to that lone spot was one to unnerve him.

At last he became comparatively calm.

His eyes were fixed upon the trail ahead, and his rifle was in hand ready for use.

For a long while he waited, and his face revealed intensest anxiety.

He had come there for a purpose, which he

was determined to carry out, and yet one from which he seemed to shrink.

"It is hard, very hard, to take his life, and yet why should I shrink—why should I be merciful to him?"

"His life should be nothing to me, and with gold at my command, my act will sit lightly on my conscience—Ah! he comes!"

For an instant he seemed wholly unnerved, as a horseman appeared in sight.

But, by a mighty effort of will power, he controlled his emotion, set his lips and brought his rifle to his shoulder.

The barrel rested upon a rock, and a bush which he had cut and stood up before him, shielded him and the weapon from view, but gave him a perfect sight at the one whom he intended to kill from an ambush, to shoot down without one word of warning.

"I must kill him—must be sure he is dead, for I know his fatal aim, and to approach him, even when he was dying, would be to meet my death.

"I shall aim at his heart, and if my rifle fails me, then I fear my end will come."

He sighted his eye along the rifle barrel as he spoke, and, as the horseman was now within ten paces of him he fired.

The bullet went true; though not to the heart of the victim, yet it brought him from his saddle and his horse, in fright, turned and ran back down the trail he had come.

The assassin stood trembling in the spot from whence he had fired.

His eyes peered through the bush upon the writhing form of the man he had shot, and he covered his ears with his hands to shut out the groans of the wounded man.

Then, as though not able to bear the sight longer, he turned away, just as the clatter of hoofs was heard approaching in the opposite direction.

Away he bounded like the guilty being he was, down the sloping ridge, and after a run of half a mile hid in a thicket of trees.

With trembling hands he loaded his rifle, and panting and scared, crouched down to rest and to wait.

Thus more than an hour went by, and at last he seemed to have nerved himself to know the worst.

Cautiously he crept back toward the top of the ridge, and had nearly reached the spot where he had stood and fired the fatal shot.

He then stopped short, for, coming out of a canyon he beheld a horseman, and following, was a led animal.

"He has buried him, and he knows his secret, has his papers and all! Therefore he, too, must die, for no life must stand between me and triumph now."

The Vagabond of the Mountains spoke in a voice firm and determined now, and he raised his rifle to his shoulder without a tremor, and, with a touch of his finger, sent the bullet on its way.

CHAPTER IV.

FOILED.

THE man whom the Vagabond Borderman shot at was Borden Branch.

The bullet had been well aimed; but the distance was greater than the shot had been when fired upon Leonard Delorme; hence it had not buried itself in the brain of the second victim.

Instead, the bullet had struck on the side of the head, with a force that would have penetrated many a skull, or at least brought the wounded man from out his saddle.

But, as we have seen, it caused Borden Branch to fall forward as though stunned.

It might have been that he was still conscious, or that the heavy stirrups, deep saddle and broad horn held him in his seat; but certain it is, that though his arms hung limp, he did not fall to the ground.

His splendid horse, alarmed by the shot, sprung forward along the trail, and the animal of the dead man, held fast by his lariat having a hitch around the horn of Borden Branch's saddle, followed rapidly.

To the dismay of the assassin, he saw his intended victim dash on out of sight.

"My God! is he dead and yet keeps his saddle?" he cried, in alarm. "I must follow and see."

So saying, he followed rapidly along on foot.

But a spur, around which the trail ran, soon showed him the two horses far down in the valley.

The rider still kept his seat, and the Vagabond cursed himself for his bad aim.

To pursue was impossible, on foot, and so he

was forced to return to the scene of his intended double murder.

He wished to know all about the dead man in his grave.

He took up the pieces of logs, dug open the grave and dragged out the body.

Eagerly he searched it, but only to find nothing, and aloud he bitterly cursed his luck.

"That man has the papers and all," he muttered, in fierce anger.

Then he hastily re-buried the body, arranged the grave as it had been before he disturbed it, and started down the mountain-side to the valley where he had left his horse.

The deserted animal had found cool water, a feast of juicy grass and the rest of a few hours had made him quite another horse.

But it was now growing dark in the valley, though the mountain-tops were yet tinged with the last rays of the setting sun, so the Vagabond Borderman decided wisely to go into camp for the night.

It was a desolate camp for him, too, though his horse fared well, as he himself had only a piece of dried buffalo-meat to eat, with no coffee, and no edibles to tempt him to a hearty repast.

Forced to return to the horse, which he had deserted, never caring whether he ever saw him again, the Vagabond went into his desolate camp until daylight should again permit him to follow the trail, for he had by no means given it up.

Oh no! to give up then was to perish, he felt, and to sacrifice the hard struggles and sufferings through which he had passed to gain a certain end.

He did not sleep well, for his heart was troubled at his deed, a deed that had thus far accomplished nothing.

How cruel fate had been to him to bring another man upon the scene, there in those wilds, at the very moment of his triumph and thus thwart him.

A few minutes before and the work would be done.

His victim was dead, that was certain, for he had dug him out of his grave, gazed into his dead face, though it had required all of his strength to do so.

But another had gotten the gold he knew, by some means, his victim had, and the papers which he had carried in his leather wallet.

Who was that other he wondered?

He knew not, yet he was his foe, because he held those papers, and he must be tracked to the end.

At last the man sunk into a feverish sleep, and when he awoke it was dawn.

He arose, ate sparingly of his little food, mounted his horse, greatly refreshed by his rest and feed, and pressed on upon the trail of the horseman.

He crossed it at the spot where he had turned off the day before to ambush his foe.

The trail was there, of the horse he had followed, and whose track he knew so well, and of the other horse of the stranger, and that hoof-mark too he had well-studied.

That he had not killed the man was certain, for if so the horses would not have gone on by that point he well knew.

So he turned upon the trail and passed rapidly as he dared, for he wished not to push his horse too hard.

He knew the country, and he knew the very spot for a second ambuscade provided that the horseman continued on the trail he was then following.

He could, when he discovered that such was the case, with his knowledge of the country, cut across and head his second victim off.

At length the trail led him out at a heavily wooded valley to the plain, and he cursed aloud as he saw heavy storm-clouds gathering.

Should rain fall it would ruin his hopes, and the trail would be destroyed.

With bitter oaths he urged on his horse and tried to overtake the man before him before the storm should come.

He was growing desperate at ill fortune and hopes deferred.

On, on he rode, until his tired horse staggered under him, and all to no purpose, for at length the rain began to pour down in torrents, the streams were flooded, and wet through, hungry and in despair he was driven to seek what shelter he could find in a canyon.

There, like a wild beast he crouched among the rocks, for he had no match to start a fire with, and his poor horse, the picture of woe, stood near to keep him company in his wretchedness.

When at last the storm swept by and he once more resumed his trailing, he found that he was foiled, for the trail was no longer visible.

CHAPTER V.

A MURDERER'S CONFESSION.

SEVERAL years before the murder of Leonard Delorme in the wilds of the frontier, by a Vagabond Borderman, a man sat in a handsome house in an Eastern State looking over some official papers.

He was a man of fine presence and his brow was marked by intelligence and refinement.

Suddenly the door of the library, for such was the room, opened and a young man entered and said:

"Governor, I have here a package which was registered, and from a distant Western post-office in a Territory, and is addressed as *strictly personal* to you."

"Thank you, Mr. Voss, and what is it all about?" asked the governor indifferently.

"Of course, sir, I did not read it."

"Ah! give it to me, and when I have finished with these papers I will look over it."

The secretary obeyed and the governor was again left alone.

In a few minutes he laid down the documents and took up the registered package.

"Ah! I have seen that hand before."

"Yes, and it is mailed at Salt Lake and bears as the name of the sender John Smith."

"That name is too general; but where have I seen this writing before?"

He broke open the package as he was speaking, and unfolded a few closely-written pages.

With them came a tin box, which was bound securely and sealed, and opening it the governor took out a pocketbook containing several checks, a safe key, a ring, a set of shirt-studs and sleeve-buttons, a watch and a chain.

There were also in the box several letters, and upon them a blood-stain.

With surprise the governor turned to the letter accompanying the box for an explanation.

It was as follows:

"SALT LAKE CITY, Oct. 1, 18—.

"To His Excellency, OLIVER SPRAGUE:—

"SIR:—It will doubtless surprise you to receive a letter from your old college chum, who, with you planned so many schemes for the future.

"You have won fame, and to-day are honored among men.

"I was left a fortune and it was my ruin, for after squandering it I ruined others whose fortunes had been intrusted to my care.

"To save myself from prison I committed murder, and the crime I allowed to fall upon another, while I, with the money gained by my deed, fled to the far West, knowing that some day the truth would be known.

"But with the sentence of another to life imprisonment I was forgotten, and no one ever suspected that I had been other than unfortunate in speculations, and so had swamped myself and others who had intrusted their all to my keeping.

"But that man, sentenced for my crime, now languishes in prison, and here, alone in the solitudes, with Nature to urge me on to do justice to one I have wronged so cruelly, I have determined to write to you, my old-time friend, and beg you to at once grant him pardon.

"I send you herewith the articles I took from the murdered man, and which at the trial of the accused could not be found.

"I alone am guilty, and the one now in prison knew nothing of the deed, and circumstantial evidence alone sent him to the life punishment he now suffers.

"I beg you to keep my secret, keep it for the sake of an old friendship, our boyhood days passed together, for this act proves my reformation, and I will tell you that I have prospered here in these western wilds beyond my wildest hopes, and will in good time restore to all whom I defrauded every dollar taken from them.

"As for myself, with murder upon my soul, I can only seek some other scene in which to pass my days until the end, and I will never place you in an awkward position by returning to my native State, you may feel assured.

"The man for whom I ask your pardon is Roy Rockford, and he is now in the State's Prison over which you hold jurisdiction.

"Even to him I beg you not to tell why you give pardon, other than to say that you are convinced of his innocence, while to the family of the murdered man please forward the things herewith sent you, and confer a lasting favor.

"I thus trust my confession, my secret, in your hands, and leave to you the carrying out of my earnest request, which I feel, from what I know of your noble nature, are not made in vain.

"Believe me, my dear friend of the past, with every good wish for your continued success and prosperity,

"Yours, still in friendship,

"LEONARD DELORME."

The governor was deeply moved by this letter, and his fine face showed it.

"Poor Leonard," he mused aloud.

"We were poor boys together in those old school days, and I heard how he had inherited a fortune, and then had lost all in mistaken specu-

lations; but I had not believed him a murderer, no, no, not that, nor did I ever believe he had intentionally defrauded any one.

"But I will act upon his request and pardon this poor fellow whom his act has made to suffer.

"I could not refuse if my duty directed otherwise, for I have not forgotten that I owe to Leonard Delorme my life, when he sprung in and saved me at the risk of death to himself, that day in the foaming torrent that ran through the mountains near our school.

"I will act at once."

The governor touched a bell, and from an inner room his secretary appeared.

"Mr. Voss, I wish you to get ready to catch the first train that will take you to the State's Prison, and I will have ready for you a pardon for a poor fellow there, whom I have reason to know has been unjustly sentenced.

The secretary looked surprised, but the governor said no more, and the next day Roy Rockford found himself, to his great amazement, a free man.

The governor had granted the appeal of his boyhood's friend, Leonard Delorme, and the prisoner, who had given up all hope of ever seeing the outside world, once more found himself free to return to his home and the one who loved him better than life.

CHAPTER VI.

A DREAM AND A VOW.

In a pretty little cottage on the outskirts of a New England town, a woman lay upon a bed of death.

Her face was marked with lines left by more than physical suffering, and her hair had whitened under sorrow rather than age, for she was scarcely more than middle age.

The surroundings were plain but comfortable, and upon the wall of the sick-room hung a portrait upon which the eyes of the dying woman were fixed with a strange look.

By the side of the invalid stood a negress, slowly fanning her and nodding at the same time, as though worn out with many vigils.

A cough from the invalid caused the negress to start and her gaze fell upon a form outside of the window.

She gave a start that caused the dying woman to turn toward her.

But the negress was perfectly calm now, and, with an excuse, left the room.

She went out of the front door and there met face to face one whose presence seemed to excite her greatly.

"Ob, Lordy! Mars' Roy! has' you escaped, sah! but hain't you afeerd they'll find yer?"

The negress grasped the hand of the man in both her own and wrung it hard.

"No, Sophy, I have not escaped; but Governor Sprague has pardoned me, from some cause doubtless convinced of my innocence.

"But about my poor mother, Sophy?"

"She is alive, sah; but not much more, and I must break it gently to her that you are here."

"Ill! is she ill?" gasped the son.

"Yes, Mars' Roy, it's her last illness."

"But what ails her, Sophy?"

"A broken heart, sah. I says it is, for you, Mars' Roy; but the doctor's got another name for it.

"I knows best, though."

"I believe you do; but my poor, poor mother!"

"Tell her softly, as best you can, that the governor has pardoned me—pardoned me for a crime I never committed, and that I am here to make her well again."

The negress returned to the sick-room, and as gently as she could, told of the return home of Roy Rockford, with a pardon from the governor.

"I have never believed him guilty, Sophy, and God bless that noble man who has set him free."

"Tell him to come, for I have not much longer to be with my poor boy."

The negress called the son into the room and then glided out, leaving him alone with his dying mother.

It did not take Roy Rockford long to discover that the end was near; that even his return home could not call back the spirit so near its flight.

That night Roy Rockford kept vigil by his mother's side while old Sophy slept.

The doctor, in calling at sunset, had said that Mrs. Rockford could scarcely live another day.

The son sat by her side, grasping her hand, while she slept.

Suddenly she awoke with a start, and her eyes fell upon her son.

"Ah, my boy, I have had such a dream!"

She spoke with a voice that was strangely strong, in comparison with her weak tones the past few weeks.

"I hope that it was a good dream, mother."

"I will tell it to you, for it seems strange that I should have such a dream to-night, just as I am on the very eve of death."

"Roy, my son, I saw in my dream the murderer of old Mr. Caradine, and I beheld his murderer face to face, and he is one whom you have ever regarded as your friend."

"I saw him kill him, rob him and then fly, and you came upon the scene after the deed was done, and was deemed guilty of the murder because your father owed Carl Caradine money that he intended to take our home to pay for."

"Oh, my son, can I, in my dying hour, have been given the power to behold the real murderer?"

The voice of the dying woman was still strong, and she seemed to have gotten a new lease of life.

"Mother, who was this murderer that you saw in your dream?" hoarsely asked Roy Rockford.

"Leonard Delorme!"

"No! no! not Leonard Delorme?"

"Yes, I saw him face to face."

"He murdered Carl Caradine and left you to suffer for his crime."

The man sprung to his feet and a bitter oath broke from his lips, for the words of his mother now opened his eyes to much that had seemed strange and unfathomable to him before.

"By heaven! but Leonard Delorme is the guilty one, as I can see now, and his flight to the far West proves as much."

"Yes, I see it all now, he did the deed, and to save himself from the gallows, I was made the victim on the circumstantial evidence brought against me."

"Mother, I believe—"

He stopped suddenly, for he knew that he gazed down into the face of the dead.

"Dead! yes, my mother is dead, but with her last breath she told me who was my bitterest foe, and there seems a strange fatality in its coming before her in a dream that Leonard Delorme was the murderer of Carl Caradine."

"I will keep the secret I have discovered; but I vow, by the Heavens above, I will track that man to the uttermost part of the earth, and bring judgment upon him for this double crime of murder, and an endeavor to let me die on the gallows to shield his own neck."

He dropped upon his knees as he spoke, and bowed his head until it rested upon the breast of the dead.

There Sophy found him in his grief an hour afterward, and the day after Mrs. Rockford was laid to rest in her grave, the place was sold, old Sophy cared for, and Roy Rockford, with all his wordly wealth in his pocket, and that not very much, started upon the track of Leonard Delorme.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VAGABOND OF THE MINES.

SOME two months prior to the shooting of Leonard Delorme from an ambush, a group of men were gathered about a mining-camp, after the evening meal, engaged in smoking and chatting.

They were a rough-looking crowd, to judge from their appearances, though there were kindly hearts beneath their woolen shirts, and most of them were toiling hard for gold to bear back with them to loved ones at home.

In their midst was a man whose appearance indicated utter wretchedness.

He was clad almost in rags, and his face wore the look of one who knew both mental and physical suffering.

His weapons, an old-fashioned rifle, revolver and knife, were in keeping with his clothes and appearance.

He seemed to be hardly one of the group, and had nothing to say, while he did not join in the laugh that now and then broke forth at some criticism uttered.

He was wont to go and come at will through the camps, and never was known to work, or to dig an ounce of gold.

He seemed ever to be preoccupied, and had won the name of the Vagabond of the Mines.

He was further known as "Rocks," and the kind-hearted miners were wont to invite him to take a meal with them when they saw him about, for he never begged and they knew he would go without food rather than ask for it.

He slept where night found him, and his horse, a sorry-looking beast, was his most intimate pard, but fared better than his master.

Suddenly there came up to the camp-fire a miner who was greeted by all warmly, for he seemed to be a general favorite.

"Did you strike it rich, Larry?"

"Find any dust, pard?"

"Heard of any new lay-outs, Larry?"

Such were some of the questions asked, and the one to whom they were addressed said with a laugh:

"I'll talk, pard, soon as I has eat suthin'."

This was a hint which resulted in a good supper being set before the new-comer, and, after having eaten heartily he said:

"I guesses, pards, as how we has about the richest mines in these parts, for in my month o' prospectin' I haven't seen any leads that panned out anything worth while, and the few other camps I visited are not so well off as we is, so it's my opinion we had better stick to well enough."

"But I struck a lone miner away up in the mountains, and passed a night in camp with him."

"Where was he, Larry?" asked one.

"Up in the mountains near Eagle's Peak, and he was a queer one, for he was a gentleman in spite o' all."

"He asked me to stop over with him, treated me prime, and said as how he had struck a lead that had about panned out all it would and he was about to break up and leave, for he had got enough to pay off some debts, and this done, he would go back to the States to live."

"And he was all alone?"

"Yes."

"He's a plucky one to stay there alone."

"You bet he is, and game clear through."

"I took quite a fancy to him, and asked him to visit us; but he said he was preparing maps of where his gold was, and the names of those it was to be paid to, in case anything should happen to him, and then intended to start for the East."

"And where was his gold?"

"That he wasn't fool enough to tell, even though he took me for honest."

"There wasn't no more gold in his neighborhood, Larry?"

"He said there wasn't, and I couldn't catch on to any sign, though I looked."

"What was his name, pard?" an old miner asked.

"I didn't ask him; but in looking at a fine rifle he had I seen the name on it of Leonard Delorme."

A cry broke from the lips of the Vagabond of the Mines, and he fell forward upon his face.

"Ther poor feller has got a fit," said one, and several sprung to his aid.

But he recovered quickly, rose, and without a word stalked away in the darkness.

Ten minutes after he had mounted his horse and ridden out of camp.

But he did not go far, as he went into camp alongside of the trail.

With the first break of dawn he was awake and examining the trail closely.

"This is the track of Miner Larry's horse," he muttered, as his eyes fell upon some hoof-marks, evidently made the night before.

Then he mounted his horse and started off on the trail he had discovered, and which led into the mining-camp.

The trail was well defined and he had little trouble in following it, and it was several hours before he halted to cook a bird he had shot, and this seemed to be his only food.

"Up near Eagle's Peak he said that the strange miner was located.

"I know the place, and I will find the man, for he is the one whom I seek."

"Yes, find him I must, and with what knowledge I have, for I dare not ask Miner Larry anything."

"No, no, and I nearly betrayed myself when he spoke his name, but made them believe I had a fit."

"Fortunately not one of them suspects."

"Oh, no, I am only poor Rocks, the Vagabond of the Mines."

"But, though half-starved, I am too proud to beg, and yet go upon this trip with little ammunition, hardly any food and with these old weapons."

"But I have not followed his trail so long, through hunger, suffering, hardships and dangers untold, not to at last triumph."

"No, I must triumph in the end," and with this resolve he mounted his horse and started upon the trail of the mysterious miner.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MINER'S LEGACY.

It was the guilty conscience of Leonard Delorme which had caused him to fly to the West, after the murder of old Mr. Caradine, for the circumstantial evidence against Roy Rockford being the murderer was so convincing that no one had suspected any one else.

Having run through the fortune he had inherited, and money intrusted to him by others, after the murder, to try and redeem himself, he had taken flight, though none had suspected him of going for other reasons than because he had been, as he had stated, unfortunate in his speculations.

He had gathered together what money he could, and having in his palmy days, hunted upon the plains, had decided to go West.

His experience in hunting on the border had taught him considerable, and equipping himself thoroughly with a couple of horses and an outfit, he had roamed from mine to mine, hoping to strike it rich.

It was upon one of these jaunts that he came upon a man lying by the trail one day, just as he was looking for a camping-place for the night.

The man at first appeared to be dead; but a groan came from his lips, and hastily dismounting, Delorme knelt by his side.

He saw that the man had been several times wounded, and, as a brook was near, he bore him thither, unpacked his traps, and made him as comfortable as possible.

For a long time he did not believe the wounded man would ever recover consciousness or speak; but he staked out his horses, built a fire, and prepared to make himself comfortable for the night.

Glancing toward the stranger he had so well cared for, he suddenly saw his eyes fixed upon him.

Instantly he stepped to his side.

"They did not kill me."

The words were barely audible as they fell from the lips of the wounded man.

"Who?"

"Those men who sought to rob me of my secret?"

"Ah! you were attacked by robbers then?"

"Yes; but, who are you?"

"A man in search of gold," was the laconic reply.

"A miner?"

"I am willing to be one if I can find the gold to dig."

"Did you save me from those men?"

"No, I found you lying by the trail, as I at first believed, dead."

"And cared for me?"

"As best I could."

"I have my death-wound."

"I hope not so bad as that, for already you are gaining strength."

"I fear it is but temporary; but, while I can, I wish to tell you that I am a miner, and I have got a paying lead, and, because I would not tell those men where my dust was they shot me."

"But I would have given up all rather than die, had I suspected they meant to carry out their threats."

"When I refused, they fired upon me and I fell, as they supposed, dead, and, robbing me of my weapons and what gold I had, along with my horse, they left me."

"Now do all you can to save my life and I will make you my pard in my find."

The man was by no means a rough borderman.

He had the look of one who had been reared in refinement, though, heavily bearded, long-haired and in coarse clothing he now appeared to be an uncouth miner, except when he spoke.

"I will do all in my power for you, sir, as I did when I did not suppose you had a dollar; but I do not ask to share your fortune for my services, as I hope to yet strike it rich myself."

"I have enough for both, and I want you to help me back to life again, for there is one I must live for."

"Should I die, then I will trust to you to give to her my share."

"But don't let me die if you can save me."

Leonard Delorme was touched by the pleading tones and look of the man, and he set to work to examine the wounds of the miner.

He did his best but could not tell how serious they were, and had hopes that the man might recover.

The next morning he fixed a *travois*, such as he had seen the Indians carry their wounded in, and put his own horse into the shafts, and led

the way under the miner's directions toward the latter's camp.

The trail was fortunately not a rough one, and the wounded man rode easily, and toward noon they entered a canyon where the mine was located.

The miner had a small, comfortable cabin there, and was soon at rest upon his bunk, while Leonard Delorme hustled about to make him comfortable.

Thus the days passed by, the miner seeming to grow stronger at first; but, after awhile becoming worse, until one night he died, after having told the man who had befriended him, that he gave to him an equal share in the mine, and left to him a solemn duty to perform.

Into the grave dug in the canyon, Delorme buried Caspar Maynell, as the miner called himself, and placed over him a stone on which he had chiseled his name, date of death and the two words:

"MY PARD."

Then it was that Leonard Delorme set to work to dig his own fortune, out of the miner's legacy to him, and maybe it was remorse, perhaps a desire to do right, and again the solitude all about him, the dwelling in the midst of nature alone, that caused him to decide to carry out the last wishes of Caspar Maynell to the letter, and also to repay the fortune he had squandered and do justice as far as lay in his power.

When at last, after long months of tire he had set forth upon his mission of good intentions with a fortune in his hands, he little dreamed that there was an avenger upon his trail, one whom he had wronged above all others—the man who had become known as the Vagabond of the Mines.

But as tireless as a bloodhound Roy Rockford tracked him, hunted out his secret mine, from what he had heard from Larry the miner, and finding that he had arrived after the departure of his intended victim, had pursued him to the bitter end, and when dying, Leonard Delorme had to leave to another, Borden Branch, to carry out the wishes of Caspar Maynell, and his own.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MINER'S HEIRESS.

In a handsomely furnished room, of an elegant mansion on the Hudson River, a woman sat in an easy-chair, gazing out upon the grand scene presented to her view from the window.

The face was lovely in the extreme, and softened by some sorrow into a look of sadness that gave her the appearance of one whose tears were constantly welling up from the heart.

She was neatly attired, and her dress fitted her graceful form to perfection, and certainly she was one to win admiration and respect from men and women alike.

Presently the door opened and in bounded a sunny-haired miss of fourteen, with a face of exquisite beauty and a form as graceful as a Hebe.

"Pardon me, dear Miss Maynell, but in the year you have been my governess I never knew you to receive a letter before, so as this one came for you, I ran at once to your room with it.

"I hope that it brings good news, for at times you seem so sad," and the pretty girl kissed the governess as she placed in her hands a letter in a large envelope and addressed to the city.

"Papa brought it from the city, having seen it advertised," added Allene St. John.

The hand of the governess trembled as she took the letter, and she seemed to try and speak, but the effort was a failure.

Allene St. John slipped out of the room.

She seemed to feel that the governess wished to be alone.

A year before her father, a wealthy merchant, had answered an advertisement, as he wished a governess for his daughter, and only child, and a lady had called at his office in the city in answer to his letter.

He was struck with her beauty and refinement of manner, as well as the sad expression that seemed indelibly stamped upon her face, and engaged her without asking for a reference.

She had simply said that her name was Cara Maynell, and that she was dependent upon her own exertions for a livelihood.

A fine musician and French and German scholar, she also possessed a voice that caused Mr. St. John to wonder why she had not adopted the stage as a profession, for with her beauty and talent as a singer she could have won her way rapidly to the front ranks.

Mrs. St. John had been charmed with the governess, and Allene at once took a great fancy to her and they became devoted friends.

Thus a year had passed, and in all that time the governess had not been known to receive a letter.

Then the merchant saw one advertised for her, and carrying it home, gave it to Allene to deliver.

The letter was postmarked at a Western frontier station, and was addressed to:

"Miss CARA MAYNELL,
"City Post-office,

"New York.

"To be advertised for three months if uncalled for after ten days."

Miss Maynell gazed at the address in seeming wonder, and when she at last found courage to open it her hands trembled, as though she shrank from doing so.

"Who has written to me, I wonder?"

"It is not my father's writing, and I could not speak when Allene gave it to me, fearing it was news from him, or of him, coming to me as from the grave, for I cannot but mourn him as dead."

So she mused, while she opened the letter.

It was dated in a far Western Territory and was as follows:

"MAYNELL MINE,

"NOVEMBER 10, 18—.

"My object in addressing Miss Maynell is to make known to her both sad and good tidings, for I am sorry to tell her of the death of one most dear to her, her father."

Here Cara Maynell gave a low moan, and her lips became set; but there was no burst of grief, no tears, and, after a moment to collect herself she read on:

"I regret to tell her that her father, Caspar Maynell, as he gave his name to me, was shot down in the mountains by desperadoes who sought to force from him a secret of where his mine was located, and where he had hidden the gold-dust he had dug therefrom."

"They had killed him, as they believed, and left him for dead on the trail, where I, an hour after, found him."

"I cared for him as best I could, and under his guidance, carried him to his lonely camp at his mine, and through his days and nights of suffering remained by his side until the end came."

"From his lips I learned that he had left you to earn your fortune in the East, while he came West to the mines to endeavor to recuperate his fallen fortunes."

"His mine was paying well, and on condition that I should give to you one-half that I dug from it, and he had laid by, he made me an equal partner in it with him."

"I pledged myself to do so, and to communicate with you, as I now do; but as your address, which he said was among his papers, I was unable to find, I now write to New York City, where he said you were dwelling, hoping this letter will reach you."

"I buried your father in the canyon, near our cabin, and cut his name and date of death on a rock at the head of the grave."

"I then went to work gold-digging, and beg to now inform you that I am ready to pay to you, when I hear from you, one-half the amount thus far realized from the mine, and there are prospects that it will yet pan out much more for you."

"When I have heard from you, I will forward to any bank you may designate, the amount that is your due, and which I may here state will be something like sixty thousand dollars."

"Kindly address me to care of postmaster at Golden City, and I will have him hold my letter for me, as I am some distance from the place."

"With deepest sympathy for you in your loss, and the hope of some day meeting one who is the daughter of him who was my friend, I remain,

"Sincerely yours,

"LEONARD DELORME."

When Cara Maynell had finished this letter she bent her head in her hands and burst into tears.

"My poor, poor father!"

"He remembered me in his dying hour, and, by making me his heiress, endeavored to redeem the past."

"God knows I forgive him; how freely, the tears that well up from my heart show."

"What a sad end was his, and how I wish I could have been with him in his last hours."

"But this noble man, Leonard Delorme, was his friend, and he certainly has proven honest toward me, for he need not have let me know that my father had left me a dollar."

"And I am to be rich once more!"

"How strange it seems; but I like my home here, and hardly care to leave it."

"I will seek Mr. St. John, and ask his advice."

She dried her eyes, and seeking the library, placed her letter in the hands of the merchant, with the words:

"I have a letter here, Mr. St. John, that tells me of my father's death."

JNA

There was a cloud between us, and I had not heard from him, or of him, for a long time.

"Please give me your advice, as to what is best to be done about this fortune he has left me."

The merchant read the letter, extended his sympathy to the daughter, and then said:

"I congratulate you, Miss Maynell, upon your good fortune, and would advise that you write at once to this miner, Leonard Delorme, and have him send you a draft for the amount."

The letter was written, and mailed the next day.

CHAPTER X.

THE WOUNDED HORSEMAN.

WHEN the avenger, now known as Rocks, the Vagabond of the Mines, fired the shot at the horseman who had just buried Leonard Delorme, and was preparing to go upon his way, his bullet was well aimed.

It struck just over the temple, and glancing on the skull, ran under the scalp until it cut its way out at the top.

The blow stunned the horseman, who fell forward upon his saddle, yet had consciousness enough left to keep his hold.

The broad horn of the saddle, and the heavy stirrups aided him in keeping his seat, while his horse sped along the ridge trail, the animal of Leonard Delorme led by the lariat.

It was along time before Borden Branch could collect his dazed senses.

The bullet had made a bare miss from taking life, and the concussion was so severe that the mind would not rally until the horse had borne his rider several miles along the trail.

When at last, by a mighty struggle he managed to command his senses he drew rein and looked about him.

He had not seen his foe, and so only knew how close a call he had had by seeing his breast and shoulder stained with blood.

His whole head ached terribly; but there was an acute pain also over his temple.

He put up his hand and felt the wound.

Skilled in surgery he at once knew how the bullet had glanced on the skull, run under the scalp to the top of the head and there cut its way out.

He felt both wounds, pressed his hand along the course of the bullet and found that the bone was not fractured.

"It was by a hair's breadth," he muttered.

He had been seated in his saddle the while, his horses halted on the trail; but he now rode forward once more until he came to a brook.

Here he dismounted and bathed his wound well and bound it up carefully, placing upon it a cloth well saturated with arnica which he took from a case he carried in his saddle pocket.

He then washed the stains off his hunting shirt and mounting, rode on his way once more.

"It is certain that the one who killed poor Delorme shot me.

"If so, he may now be on my trail, and I must be careful," he mused.

That night he camped away from the trail, and, as though skilled in prairie craft the next day doubled on his trail so as to get behind any one who might be following him.

As he was constantly on the alert, the Vagabond of the Mines doubtless owed it to the storm that he was not killed by the horseman whose trail he had been pursuing until the rain had destroyed all traces of his tracks.

That this was the case the horseman seemed to realize at once, for he went on his way without seeming dread of further pursuit.

It was his desire to at once seek the mine of Leonard Delorme, to see if all there tallied with what he had been told by the dying man, and if there was the amount of gold-dust on hand to pay the sums annexed to the names of the different people written down upon the list.

Having made this discovery, having convinced himself that the whole statement of Leonard Delorme was correct, he would know just what to do.

So he went over the written directions of the dead man carefully, studied the map, and then set out for the mine.

With the description of its surroundings, just where to start and the map, all before him, it was not the easy task many might have thought it to be, to find the mine there in that trackless land of the West.

But Borden Branch went about the work intelligently, and he showed his skill as a plains man and mountaineer.

Whatever the motive that had brought him to the frontier, he certainly had posted himself in its dangers and just how to follow a trail.

He knew that the land was comparatively un-

known, with here and there a few scattering mining-camps, and a semi-weekly coach to these camps, and no other civilization could be boasted of.

There were bitter foes of the pale-faces ever on the alert to kill them, in roving bands of Indians, and besides there were road-agents, a gang of mounted white robbers, ever ready to rob the miner of his hard-earned gold.

Against such dangers he had to contend, he was well aware, while more, if the locality of the mine became known, there were scores of reckless, lawless miners, who would come and overrun the neighborhood in search of other leads, and perhaps encroach upon the one he was in search of.

Leonard Delorme had evidently kept the existence of his mine a secret from others, and it was best that he, Borden Branch, should do so too.

So he went slowly, carefully and surely on his way until certain marks, indicated on the map, told him that he was near the mine.

The country had grown wilder as he went along, and not a trail other than one made by wild beasts had met his eye on his last day of travel.

As he came in sight of a canyon, turning off from a valley, he halted.

"There are the two trees, one on either side of the canyon, standing like sentinels, as the map shows, so there is where I am to go."

So saying, he turned his horse into the canyon.

After a ride of a mile, he found that it branched off into a score of smaller canyons, or glens, narrow, with high banks, heavily wooded, and wild looking in the extreme.

He again consulted his map.

"The fifth small canyon from the right," he said aloud, and then he counted the fifth canyon and turned into it.

Through this a stream ran, and several times had he to ford it before he came to the head.

There he found the stream dashing down a narrow gorge, and upon one side of it, hidden among a dense growth of pines was a small cabin.

Beyond the pines the land rose to a ridge, but it was not so steep but that the horse could climb it, and the trailer was glad to discover that there was plenty of grass on all sides.

The cabin was locked, but the trailer had the key, and opening the door, he was surprised to see how comfortable a home Leonard Delorme had made for himself there in those wilds.

There was a bunk with ample bed-clothing, a table, chair, cupboard and broad fire-place, on the hearth of which were several cooking-utensils.

A shelf contained a few dozen books, an inkstand, paper and pens, with some surveyor's instruments, a clock that was still ticking away, and looking at a watch he drew from an inner pocket of his hunting-shirt, he discovered that it was very nearly right in the time.

There was a rifle and other weapons in brackets on the wall, a saddle and bridle and other things to indicate that more than one person had occupied the cabin, but at different times Borden Branch was sure, though the dying man had made no mention of having had a companion.

Having lighted a fire in the cabin and thrown the door and one window open for air, he went out to look up a place to put his horses.

He soon found that Leonard Delorme had made a pasture for his horse in one of the canyons, and here he staked the two animals out after he had left their traps at the cabin.

The map told of a *cache* where the solitary miner had kept his provisions, which he was wont to go after to the camps every two months, and Borden Branch knew that he would have ample to eat along with the quantities of game with which the country abounded.

Referring once more to his map he found that Leonard Delorme had picked his gold in places here and there, doing it when he could find a lead and also found some in "pockets" in the water-ways.

An examination of the surroundings showed him that there was considerable of the yellow metal yet to be gotten out of the canyon, while the hiding place of the miner's pickings revealed the fact that he had laid in even more than the amount he had stated in his notes and directions.

With this discovery Borden Branch took a short run along the ridge, brought down some game and retracing his steps to the cabin set to work to prepare his supper, for the shadows of night were infolding the canyon in gloom.

Wood was abundant, and with his horses cared for, a blazing fire on the hearth, and hav-

ing had a good supper, he sat down to the enjoyment of his pipe and to reverie.

And his reveries turned upon a grave near the cabin, and upon the inscription on a rock at its head, which showed that Leonard Delorme had not been alone in his possession of the mine.

It was the grave of Caspar Maynell.

CHAPTER XI.

THE REWARD OF PATIENCE.

THE Vagabond of the Mines was not one to give up a trail readily.

He had followed that of the man who had so deeply wronged him too long and earnestly to yield at trifles.

He knew nothing of Leonard Delorme's letter to Governor Sprague, confessing his guilt, and appealing for a pardon for him, Roy Rockford.

He only knew that Leonard Delorme had been his friend, and he had intrusted to him as such, not only what money he had of his own, but important secrets of his employers; which had enabled him to gain from him, Carlos Caradine, a considerable sum, and in the end take his life when discovered robbing him, as he felt no doubt had been the case.

Upon him—Roy Rockford—had Leonard Delorme allowed the charge of the murder to fall.

He had allowed him to be tried for his life and be found guilty, with a recommendation to mercy from the jury, which had saved him from the gallows, and thus his sentence had been for life.

Not a suspicion had come to him of his friend's guilt, until the dream told him of his dying mother.

Then many things had been recalled that told him the dream had been a true one, had revealed the true murderer.

Then he learned how Leonard Delorme had left the neighborhood, going, no one knew where, and supposed to be a ruined man financially.

With the proceeds of the sale of his little house in his pocket, all he possessed on earth, Roy Rockford had set out upon his work as a detective, self-constituted.

He had just visited the governor, to thank him for his pardon, and try and learn from him just what reason he had had for granting that pardon.

The governor was too astute a man to give any inkling of the truth, and so Roy Rockford left disappointed, though he felt sure some outward pressure had been brought to bear upon the Executive to do what he did.

Going then to the old house of Leonard Delorme, Roy Rockford had gathered all the information possible regarding him, and felt assured that he had been the guilty one, which his mother's dream had revealed him to be.

Then he, by ingenious devices, found out that Leonard Delorme had gone West, and had last been heard from in Salt Lake City.

He had a large photograph, a perfect likeness of the man he sought, and he at once went to Salt Lake City.

There he found that his man had remained some little while, making occasional trips away for a week or two, and at last he met a man who had been the guide of Leonard Delorme to the gold mines.

Roy Rockford was now on the right track, and so he bought a horse, saddle, bridle, and arms.

He, in fact, purchased a complete outfit for the trail, and, with the guide under his pay for a month, he set out for the mines.

He made his guide his teacher, and he was quick to learn.

The guide was a man thoroughly versed in all prairie and mountain craft.

He knew the habits of all wild animals; could read all "signs" that appeared on a trail; was aware of the location of Indian villages, and where to expect them on a raid.

He knew the trails haunted by road-agents, and every mining-camp for many miles around.

And more, he was willing to talk when he found so good a listener.

In this way Roy Rockford discovered much that was of a vast deal of service to him in the future.

They reached the mining-camp, whither the guide had taken Leonard Delorme.

But, after a short stay there, Roy Rockford found that his enemy had departed for another camp.

He paid his guide and dismissed him.

This left him with but a hundred dollars in money.

From camp to camp he went, then to a fort,

always in the track of his enemy, yet never coming up with him.

His money gave out, economical as he was.

At first he worked a little in the mines, to get money, but this was making slow progress, and he began to sell his outfit piece by piece.

His five horses went, then his saddle and bridle were traded off, his repeating rifle was sold, and in its place he got an old-fashioned weapon.

One revolver, then another went, and his fine bowie-knife followed.

He replaced them all as best he could, but at last he had little left.

He would not work, for he was too restless to do this; he had to be constantly on the hunt.

He begged from no man, kept apart from his fellow-beings, and, becoming at last an object of pity in his destitution and loneliness, was forced to accept aid from the miners in the way of food, for he would take nothing else.

So passed the time away until Roy Rockford won the well-deserved name of the Vagabond of the Mines.

It was while in a camp, seated apart, silent, friendless, but watchful, he had heard the story of Larry the miner, who had been sent by his comrades upon a tour of prospecting through the mountains.

Larry had been a geologist, and so had a good idea of ores, and went upon his trip, which resulted in his discovery of Leonard Delorme.

The Vagabond had heard mention of his enemy's name, and the reader knows how he at once started out to find him.

He arrived to find Leonard Delorme just starting out upon his mission to try and atone for the past as much as in his power lay.

He had lingered about the mine unable to nerve himself to kill his foe, until one day he found that Leonard Delorme had departed for some place unknown to him.

Half-starved, suffering, revengeful, he had followed, and the reader knows the result.

When he was foiled by the presence of Borden Branch, he had sent a death-shot at him, and then, failing to kill, had pursued him until the rain-storm had destroyed the trail.

But he was not to be thwarted, and so had decided that Borden Branch had gone to the mine of Leonard Delorme.

Thither he went, and a few crackers and what game he killed were his only food, and he ate nothing unless forced to do so by the most gnawing hunger.

He reached the mine of his old foe, and found that his surmise was right, Borden Branch was there.

"Why should I not have all?"

"I have suffered much, and his life alone stands between me and wealth."

"He must die."

Such had been the determined words of the Vagabond, who at last had come to the end of the trail he had so tirelessly and patiently followed.

CHAPTER XII.

A SECOND LETTER.

MONTHS passed away and no response came to the letter which Cara Maynell the beautiful governess had written to Leonard Delorme, in answer to the one telling her of her father's death and the fortune in store for her.

She had, after a reasonable time, at the request of Mr. St. John, written again, and no response had come to her.

Then, as she was about to write to the postmaster of the mining-camp where Leonard Delorme had told her to address his letter, to make inquiry regarding her correspondent, a letter arrived for her.

It was addressed as before to the General Delivery of the New York Post-Office, just as the other had been, though she had given an address at the merchant's store, in the letters she had written.

The letter was mailed from the same mining-camp as the first had been, but the writing was in a different hand.

As before, too, the letter had been advertised, and this had caught the eye of the merchant, who had gotten it and taken it out home with him.

Allene St. John had taken the letter to her governess, who, seeing the postmark and strange hand, had not opened it, but at once sought the merchant in his library.

"As you have been so kind, Mr. St. John, to interest yourself in my affairs, I have brought my letter to you unopened to read to you," she said.

"I confess a curiosity as well as interest, Miss Cara, to know the contents of your letter, as I

observed, though in a different writing, it was mailed at the same camp as the other, and directed to Mrs. instead of Miss," said Mr. St. John.

"Pray open it, sir."

The merchant did so, and he gave a whistle as he beheld a draft.

It was a Salt Lake bank draft on a New York bank, and made payable to Mrs. Cara Maynell.

The draft was for the sum of five thousand dollars, and the letter was dated at the "Maynell-Delorme Mine," and written some six weeks before its reception by Cara Maynell.

"Please read it aloud," said Cara Maynell, and her face showed that she was affected by the coming of the letter and the inclosure of the draft, which certainly gave a tangible look to the fortune the former communication had stated she was to receive.

"The handwriting has a familiar look to me, Mr. St. John, but yet I cannot recall the writer," said the governess, as she glanced at the envelope.

The merchant made no reply, but at once read the letter aloud, as follows:

"MISS CARA MAYNELL:—

"DEAR MADAM:—You will doubtless be surprised at hearing from a stranger, from the wilds of the far West, but I write to place before you certain facts of deep interest to yourself.

"Permit me to say first that I am a rover for pleasure through the West, and thus came upon the one of whom I now write.

"I was going along a lonely trail in the mountains, leading from one mining-camp to another, when I heard a shot, and came upon a man lying wounded by the wayside.

"I dismounted, and learned that he had been shot from an ambush, but search for his assassin failed to reveal him.

"The man was dying, and realizing the fact, placed in my hands the carrying out of certain matters which he had started himself to avenge when he came to his untimely end.

"He gave his name as Leonard Delorme, and it was very evident that he had been born and bred a gentleman.

"His story, hastily told, was to the effect that he had squandered a fortune, and the fortunes of others, and then sought the mines to endeavor to redeem his honor by gaining riches and repaying all he owed with interest.

"He had gotten a good paying mine, how he did not say, and had dug from it sufficient gold to pay up all liabilities, while he yet would have ample to make him a rich man.

"He had a map of the mine, the trail to it, with full directions, and more, he had the names of all creditors, with the sums due them, their addresses and all else to guide me.

"I pledged myself to the task, took possession of his papers, belt of gold and other things, after which I buried him in the mountains.

"I was about to resume my journey, leading his horse, when a shot came from an unseen foe.

"It struck me over the temple, and for a while I was half-stunned, or dazed.

"My horse must have run off with me from the spot, for I came to consciousness to find myself miles away from the scene of the tragedy.

"I found my wound was not serious, so went on to the Delorme Mine.

"I found it with little difficulty, and discovered the miner's cabin, and that he had a very comfortable home for these parts.

"The mine, if I might so call it, consisted of pickings from the sides of the hills, pockets in the waterways and findings of various kinds, but all panned out well.

"Miner Delorme had laid aside in a secret hiding-place his find, and I discovered that it was of considerable value, quite a fortune in fact.

"But I made another discovery, and that is what interests you particularly.

"From certain papers, I found that Delorme had not been the discoverer of the mine, but one Caspar Maynell, who had been found dying on the trail by Miner Delorme, and taken to his camp by him was nursed until his death some time after.

"Miner Maynell had given Delorme in return for his care of him, a half interest in the mine, on condition that the latter turned over to you one-half of the value dug from it.

"Thus Delorme had placed at the head of his list of creditors, your name, with the following explanation:

"To Mrs. Cara Maynell send one-half the amount now dug from the mine, and to her also give an equal part of all the mine may yet yield, for it is her just due."

"A grave in the canyon has a rock at the head in which is cut the name of Caspar Maynell, and the date of his death, with the words:

"MY PARD!"

"This doubtless was done by Delorme, and the papers make you a sharer in the property.

"I carried out the instructions of Delorme, in that I transported the gold to the nearest point where I could turn it into cash, and forwarded a draft for each amount named, addressed to the name of the person on the list.

"I had over five thousand dollars, which I send in a draft to you; but understand that there is over ten times that amount in hiding at the mine that belongs

to you, and which I will send you draft for when I hear from you as to its disposition.

"As I understand it, from papers found here, Caspar Maynell was your father, and you are now half owner in the Maynell-Delorme Mine.

"To me Delorme left his share, so we are equal partners in all that I may find in gold-dust in the future from the mine, as the amounts paid to Delorme's list of creditors, and the treasure now here awaiting your order, about exhausts all the gold dug to date; but it is fair to suppose it will pan out as well in the future as in the past, so you may consider your fortune thus far to aggregate in the neighborhood of sixty thousand dollars, with the hope of securing as much more, if not even double that sum in the future, for I shall do my best to make out of it all I can for you.

"As the matter then now stands, Maynell lost his life by being murdered, Delorme cared for him until he died, and became half owner.

"Delorme was also murdered mysteriously, and his share went to pay creditors.

"I now hold his interest, with you as partner.

"Write me as to what you desire done, and believe that I will honestly carry out your every wish.

"With respect,

"B. BORDEN,

"Maynell-Delorme Mine,
"GULCH CITY CAMP,
"Colorado."

Such was the letter from B. Borden, and at its conclusion, Mr. St. John and Cora Maynell sat gazing at each other in astonishment, for the same thought was in the minds of each.

CHAPTER XIII.

A MYSTERY TO BE SOLVED.

WHEN a few moments of silence had passed, in which both were busy with their thoughts, Cara Maynell said:

"What do you make out of this letter, Mr. St. John?"

"It is a very comprehensive letter."

"True, and explains why I have not heard from my former correspondent, Leonard Delorme."

"Fully."

"There can be no doubt now about my father's untimely and sad end."

"None."

"And that he left me the fortune?"

"Not the slightest doubt in the world, Miss Cara."

"My poor, poor father," and she hastily brushed a tear from her eyes.

"The draft there proves the sincerity of your new correspondent, Miss Cora."

"Yes, sir."

"It is a draft on a New York bank, and I will take you to the city to-morrow, so you can draw the money and deposit to your own account."

"Thank you, sir."

"But to-night you had better write your letter to your new correspondent."

"I will, sir," and Cara Maynell seemed to be in a reverie.

"Do you recall the name, B. Borden, for you said you thought that the writing was familiar?"

"No, I know no one by that name, though I once had a friend whose first name was Borden, and his last name began with the same initial; but the writing is not his, nor is he in the West, but in Europe."

"Miss Cara, have you noted about this affair what I have?"

"I do not exactly understand to what you refer, Mr. St. John?"

"Do you see any mystery in all this?"

"Ab, yes, I do."

"What mostly impresses you as the mystery?"

"The death of my father at the hands of an unknown foe, then the murder of Mr. Delorme by an unseen assassin, and the shot at my last correspondent, Mr. Borden."

"Yes, it would seem to me that one person fired the three shots."

"It does look as though some foe followed the three who knew of the existence of the mine."

"So I think, but I am glad that Mr. Borden at least was fortunate enough to escape."

"So am I; but I will write him at once," and at the request of Mr. St. John Miss Maynell seated herself at his library desk and wrote to her miner correspondent, as follows:

WILDLANDS MANOR.

"MINER B. BORDEN:—

"My DEAR SIR:—Your letter has this day been received, with its inclosed draft of five thousand dollars, and I hasten to thank you for having relieved my mind upon a matter that has sorely troubled me of late, and also for the money sent, which your communication explains is a part of a fortune in gold-dust left me by my poor father.

"Let me explain that some years ago my father was unfortunate in his financial matters and lost every dollar, and went off, I knew not where.

"It seems that he was fortunate enough to dis-

cover a gold mine, which, alas! cost him his life, and from Mr. Leonard Delorme, who you doubtless know found him wounded by the roadside, he owed it that his latter days were cared for.

"Mr. Delorme wrote me, though you do not refer to the matter, telling me of my half-interest with him in the mill, and asking me to address him at a certain point, which I did, with full instructions.

"I heard nothing from him, so wrote again and again without reply, and the letters doubtless await him at the mining-camp post-office, and you are at liberty to call and get them, opening them, of course, to note their contents.

"Your letter explains the sad reason why I did not hear from Mr. Delorme, but, with the shot given you, and which I am glad for your sake was not fatal, causes me to feel that there is some secret foe of all connected with the Maynell-Delorme Mine, and I advise you to be most careful as to whom you trust, and cautious as to your movements.

"This advice is suggested by one who has my interest at heart and to whom I have submitted your letter of course.

"I would say that you can send me drafts for my share in the Maynell-Delorme Mine as before, but pray deduct all expenses from my share.

"I send within an address in the city which will reach me.

"With warmest thanks for your great kindness, believe me,

"Sincerely yours, CARA MAYNELL."

This letter Mr. St. John read carefully and fully approved of, and it was sent on its way to the far frontier the following morning, and a reply was anxiously looked for, not only by Cara Maynell, but by Mr. and Mrs. St. John and Allene, all of whom were most deeply interested in the beautiful governess.

"I am afraid you will give me up now, Miss Cara, as you are so rich," said Allene one day to her governess.

"No indeed, Allene, not until your father thinks you have advanced beyond my care and teaching, for I dearly love you all and look upon Wildlands as my home.

"My fortune will simply enable me to have what I want, and I can ask no more."

"You have many gentlemen admirers now, Miss Cara, but seem to care little for them.

"I hope you won't get married."

Allene saw that she had touched her governess to the heart, for the face paled, the head drooped forward and a low moan came from her lips.

"Forgive me, for I know I said something to hurt you," and Allene with tears in her eyes dropped down on her knees before her teacher and threw her arms about her neck.

"There, do not mind it, Allene, for it was simply a sad memory of the past, called up by your words that hurt me.

"It is over now, so come, let us take a gallop on horseback, for I see the horses are being brought around."

But days passed into weeks, and one, two, three months went by and no letter came from the man of the Maynell-Delorme Mine.

There was another mystery in this to be solved.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DETECTIVE CHIEF.

THE not hearing from the miner, B. Borden, as he signed himself, was a cause of not only great anxiety, but surprise to all at Wildlands, the lonely home of Merchant Thomas St. John.

The St. Johns had come to love the governess as though she was really one of their family by kindred ties.

Her beautiful, sad face had won them at first, but then her refinement, her accomplishments, and her lovely character had increased their respect and admiration to love.

They were still in ignorance of her past, any more than had been discovered by the two letters from Leonard Delorme and Miner Borden which she had shown to Mr. St. John.

Whether she was married, or unmarried, they did not know.

Upon coming to Wildlands she had given her name as *Miss Cara Maynell*; but the letters had come addressed to *Mrs. Cara Maynell*.

Could it be that she was really married?

That Mr. St. John would not ask her.

She had known some deep sorrow, that was certain; but she was the lady to the manner born in appearance and actions, her education was far above the average, her accomplishments, as musician, singer, artist, and linguist such as to cause others to envy her, and she had proven herself a most competent teacher.

She had inherited, so stated letters from the West, a fortune from her father.

Why need more be asked about her?

So thought both Mr. St. John and his wife, and Allene having told them how she had hurt the governess, in speaking of her marrying,

they were careful to avoid any allusion that might give her pain.

As no letter came to her, with her they were anxious, and at last, as months went by, and no word came from Miner Borden, a consultation was held one night in the library.

The result of this consultation was that Mr. St. John decided to bring Captain John Boland, the detective chief, up to Wildlands with him the following evening, and put the entire matter before him, to see what was best to be done.

So the next evening there arrived with Mr. St. John, the famous detective chief, Captain John Boland.

The letters of Leonard Delorme and Miner Borden were placed before the detective, who read them with an unmoved face.

Then he asked:

"Had your father any one enemy, Miss Maynell, who might have dogged his steps for revenge?"

"I know of no one," was the answer, after some hesitation.

"He was once a very rich man?"

"Yes."

"But failed?"

"He lost his wealth by unfortunate speculations."

"He had no entangling alliances?"

"I do not understand you, sir."

"Pardon me, but there was no woman in the case?"

"None that I ever heard of, sir."

"Your mother has been some time dead?"

"Yes, since my childhood; but may I ask the necessity of these questions, sir?"

"I beg pardon, Miss Maynell, but I do not wish to work in the dark."

"Knowing your mother to have died years ago, that your father had no entangling alliances, I can dismiss at once the belief of a woman in the case, and turn toward a man, for revenge was doubtless the cause of your father's death, and, if not, it was the desire to get his wealth."

"In the latter case why did the man delay so long, that is between your father's death and the shot at this person, Miner Borden, to get possession of his wealth?"

"I can see much mystery in the case, and cannot believe, after Borden's letter to you, that he has been tempted to defraud you out of your fortune."

"Yet, human nature is weak, and such might have been the case."

"I cannot believe it, sir."

"Nor I," added Mr. St. John, while Cara Maynell continued:

"I did doubt the miner, Leonard Delorme, and so did Mr. St. John; but we wronged him, you see, and I now feel that there is some good motive why Miner Borden has not written as he promised."

"You have had but this one letter from him?"

"That is all."

"That came five months ago?"

"Yes."

"And you have written several times?"

"Five letters in all, Captain Boland."

"Did you write to have your letters returned to you, if not called for?"

"I did."

"That is strange if the postmaster understood his business."

"It is a mining-camp only, and doubtless mail delivery is very lax there," suggested Mr. St. John.

"Well, it is a most interesting case, and I am sorry that my duties will not permit me to go myself to work it up; but I have just the man for you."

He must be a man of undaunted nerve and skill," said Mr. St. John.

"He is."

"In fact, several should go."

"That I leave to him for he will know best."

"Can I send a dispatch to the town, Mr. St. John, to get my man here on the first train?"

"Certainly," and a servant was ordered to mount a horse and ride to town with a dispatch, having just time to catch the office open for it was near the closing time.

Then the detective chief set to work preparing his plan for the man to work upon.

He took the envelopes addressed to Miss Maynell, as specimens of the writing of Delorme and B. Borden, and which had also the written name of mining-camp and date of mailing in the hands of the two post-masters, for the writing on each was in a different hand.

Copies of the letters were made, by Cara Maynell and Allene St. John, to save time, and all the data necessary was prepared for the detective who was to ferret out this Borden mystery.

It was late when the party retired for the night: but Cara Maynell was awakened at eight the next morning by Allene St. John who said:

"Get up, Miss Cara, for the detective has come, for Captain Boland drove to the station for him, and he's the handsomest boy I ever saw."

"Boy, Allene!"

"Yes, he is a boy if I am a girl, as he does not look a day over eighteen, and he's handsome as a picture."

"He seems to have made an impression upon you at first sight, Allene," laughed the governess, as she began her toilet.

"He has, and I guess its a case of love at first sight," and with a merry laugh Allene left the room, and descended to the piazza to get another look at the handsome "Boy Detective" as she called him.

CHAPTER XV.

A STRANGER IN THE CITY.

A YOUNG man, almost, if not quite a boy in years, was seated in the window of a New York hotel one morning, gazing out upon the busy scene in the street, when his eyes, as he leant far over to view a passing four-in-hand, fell upon a handkerchief lying on the top of the framing of the window beneath him.

It was tied up at the ends, and evidently held something within its folds.

Its position was such as to indicate that it had fallen from the window sill of the room in which the youth sat.

Stepping to the corner of the room the youth took from a rifle case a ramrod, with a small screw on the end, and with this he reached the handkerchief, twisted the screw into it and drew it up to his hand.

Opening it he started at what he discovered.

There was within it a lot of jewelry, consisting of a diamond necklace and bracelet, several rings containing costly gems, some ear-rings, a lady's and gentleman's watch and chains, and a purse filled with money, along with a roll of bank-notes.

"My God!" said the youth as he gazed upon the treasure before him.

"Ten dollars in my pocket, just wondering what I could do, here in this great city and not a single friend, and now the possessor of a small fortune, for what I have here is worth fully thirty thousand dollars.

"Well, it is not mine; but, under my poverty-stricken circumstances I must bury my pride and accept a reward which will be given for them, and that will enable me to go West once more.

"Ah! it may be, unknown as I am, that I will be suspected of the robbery of these things.

"I must go slow."

He examined all he had found closely, and then said:

"Now to find the owners of these jewels and money."

He saw on the lady's watch the monogram in diamonds:

"S. E. D."

On the gentleman's watch were the initials:

"M. D."

The handkerchief was a silk one and bore the initials:

"L. E."

Over these initials was embroidered an eagle holding in its talons a lance.

For some time the youth sat in deep meditation.

He was evidently studying up the "case," and the best way to go about its solution.

As he sat there the light revealed a handsome face, one with almost the perfection of feature.

There was intelligence, fearlessness and resolution stamped upon his face beyond his years, for he scarcely seemed over eighteen.

His eyes were large and dark, full of expression and fire, and his hair was brown, soft and wavy long, for it fell upon his broad shoulders.

His complexion was darkly bronzed, as though from exposure from a life in the open air, and his form was tall, elegant, yet muscular.

He was dressed well, but his clothes began to show the effects of steady wearing.

Upon a table near a belt containing a pair of silver mounted revolvers, and in the corner stood a repeating rifle of recent manufacture, while on the floor were a Mexican saddle, horse-hair bridle with silver buckles and a lariat.

A gripsack near completed his traps and it looked as though he had just arrived in the hotel, in the town in fact, for he had been landed, only a couple of hours before, from a *Vera Cruz* steamer.

At last, as though he had decided how to act, his face brightened, and he rose to his feet.

The handkerchief with its valuables found a hiding-place in his pocket, and he descended to the office and asked the clerk to permit him to look over the register.

He ran his finger over the names, going back for a week, and stopped at:

"MR. MURRAY DUNLAP AND WIFE,

"Mobile Al."

"The number of their room is 145, and mine is 147, and communicates, for I recall the door between," he said to himself.

Then he again looked over the register and found the name:

"LANCE EAGLE,

"New York."

"That explains the eagle with the lance in his talons, embroidered on the handkerchief," muttered the youth, and he asked the clerk:

"Do you know a Mr. Lance Eagle in town?"

"Yes, sir, I know him."

"Have you seen him lately?"

"He came back from Europe a week ago and stopped with us over night, before going home."

"Where does he live?"

"On Staten Island."

"Has he a business address?"

"Not now, for his father left him a fortune I believe; but you can find out at the Whip and Spur Club."

"Thank you; but have Mr. and Mrs. Dunlap left for their home in the South?"

"They have left the hotel, but are in the city, waiting to see if they cannot hear of some diamonds and money stolen from them."

"Do you know them?"

"No, but I have an introduction to them."

"You will find them at the house of Doctor Richard Salter, on Fifth avenue near the Park," said the obliging clerk, referring to an address-book.

"Thank you," and the youth returned to his room.

He listened, and felt sure no one was in the next room, so he sat down to the table, and wrote a few lines on a piece of paper.

This he slipped under the door between his room and the next.

Going out into the hall he called to a chambermaid.

"A piece of paper has blown under the door of my room into the next apartment, so will you kindly get it for me?"

His request was made politely, and a half-dollar added force to it, so that the pass-key was forthcoming and the chambermaid opened the door.

The youth saw that it was a large room and that there was a beam against the door between the two rooms, and the lock and key was on that side.

The door did not open outward, but by sliding back into the wall.

The paper was found and the youth returned to his room, the chambermaid to her work.

Then the youth took up a steel instrument he had found on the floor of his room that morning.

It was an odd tool, and its use he could not understand.

Suddenly, after a close examination of it, he started to his feet and walked over to the sliding door between the rooms.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE UNKNOWN DETECTIVE.

WITH the strange instrument in his hand, the youth examined the keyhole of the door.

He saw that the key was on the other side, and the door was certainly locked.

Then he took the instrument and inserted it into the lock, and by moving a slide caught the end of the key in a vise-like grip with the steel pinchers of the tool.

This enabled him to turn the key in the lock, and a slight force rolled the door back so that he could see into the room and was able to place his hands upon all parts of the top of the marble bureau, by moving the glass slightly.

He gave a low chuckle, closed and relocked the door and soon after left his room.

He made his way out of the hotel and sought the Whip and Spur Club.

The butler at that elegant establishment told him that Mr. Lance Eagle was not in, but would doubtless be during the afternoon.

The butler was called aside, and a ten-dollar bill placed in his hand.

It was the youth's last bank-note, but he felt he had more to draw on in his pocket, as he would not spare the treasure he had found in

carrying out the work he had set himself to perform.

"You see I am a poor relative of Mr. Eagle, and have just come to town, hoping he can get me work to do, so I'd like to ask you some questions, if you can be discreet, and I won't forget you if you help me."

"Certainly, sir, certainly; how can I serve you?" and the butler pocketed the ten.

"Mr. Eagle is a very rich man, is he not?"

"Well, sir, his father left him rich, but you see he owed so much it took more than half to pay up."

"You see I was his butler before he came here."

"And he's not rich now?"

"He's got his home on Staten Island, sir, but that is mortgaged for full value, and he sold his carriages and horses when he went to Europe six months ago."

"You see, sir, he gambles heavily, and lives extravagantly, and I really don't think he has a dollar of his own to-day."

"He's a fine gentleman, is Mr. Eagle, and is very popular; but he keeps his misfortunes pretty well hidden from the public, so few know that he is not the rich man he appears."

"But I guess he can help you, sir."

"Thank you; but he came back from Europe only lately."

"Yes, sir, about a week ago."

"On what steamer?"

"The Arago, sir."

"Ah, yes," and telling the butler that he would see him again, the young detective went down to the office of the steamer line that the Arago belonged to.

An examination of the books showed among the list of passengers the names of Mr. and Mrs. Murray Dunlap and Mr. Lance Eagle.

The youth smiled and then returned to the club of the Whip and Spur, and asked the butler to describe to him Mr. Lance Eagle, as he did not know him by sight.

"A tall, handsome gentleman, sir, about thirty, though looking older from fast living, and— There he is now!"

A stage was passing, and the gentleman in question got out.

The youth eyed him closely, and, as he passed in to the club, saw that his face wore a haggard look.

Then the detective called a cab, and told him to drive to the residence of Dr. Richard Salter, on Fifth avenue, near the Park.

Half an hour after he was set down in front of a handsome residence, on the door of which was the name:

"RICHARD SALTER, M.D."

"Is Mr. Murray Dunlap stopping here?" he asked the liveried servant who appeared at the door.

"Yes, sir, but he is not in."

"Is Mrs. Dunlap in?"

"Yes, sir."

"Ask her if she will see me, please?"

"Your card, sir, please?"

"I have none," and youth's face flushed as though it was a crime to be found without so important a piece of pasteboard.

"Say simply that a gentleman wishes to see her, as her husband is not in."

The youth was ushered into the parlor, for there was that in his appearance to command respect, and soon after a young and lovely-faced lady entered.

She was handsomely dressed, and turned her large, dark eyes upon the visitor as though in wonder as to who he was.

The youth bowed in a courtly way, and said:

"Mrs. Dunlap, I believe?"

"Yes, sir, but I have not the pleasure of knowing you, I believe?"

"No, madam; but I asked for you as the servant told me your husband was out."

"Yes, he has gone down-town with Doctor Salter; but may I ask your business with him?"

"I am a detective, Mrs. Dunlap, and called to ask the nature of your losses some time ago?"

"Oh, yes; but have you a clew to them?"

"I think that I have; but when and where where they stolen?"

"Now that is just what worries my husband and myself."

"We arrived in port at night, and deciding to come at once ashore, as we found we could do so, got up and dressed hastily, and I put, or thought that I did so, my jewels, our watches and some money, in my hand sachet."

"We drove to the hotel, retired, and the next morning found all missing."

"And the hand sachet?"

"Was where I put it on the bureau, but there was little in it."

"And your door was locked?"

"Oh, yes, and the door between our room and the next one also, though the person occupying it was a friend."

"His name, please?"

"I do not mind telling you: it was Mr. Lance Eagle, whom we met on the steamer, and as you must know, a New Yorker of wealth and position."

"Oh, yes; then you must have left your diamonds on the steamer?"

"Yes, though no trace could be found there of them."

"May I ask their value?"

"The watches and jewelry were worth all of twenty-five thousand dollars, for my property were bridal presents to me from my husband and dear friends, and there were some two thousand dollars in money."

"Any names on the jewelry?"

"On my watch was the monogram, S. E. D., which were the initials of my name, Sue Edmondson, with my husband's name, Dunlap, added."

"Thank you, Mrs. Dunlap, and let me say that I will give you hope that your valuables may be found."

"There is a reward of five thousand offered for them, sir."

"Thank you," and the youth turned and left the house, leaving the handsome young wife in a very joyful mood at the hope of finding her property.

"Do you know a good detective agency here?" asked the youth of his cabman, as he left the Salter mansion.

"There's after being Captain Boland's Secret Service Agency, sir," said the cabman.

"Drive me there," was the response.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE YOUNG BORDERMAN.

CAPTAIN JACK BOLAND, one of the noted Secret Service chiefs of the great metropolis, sat in his private office when a stranger was announced.

"I am very busy, George, so see what he wishes," said the chief.

"To see you, sir, he said."

"All right, show him in," and the chief took a seat at another desk, where his face would be in shadow, and that of his visitor in the light of the window, while behind the latter's seat was a full length mirror, revealing every movement.

Before the chief, hidden, however, under the edge of the desk were a pair of cocked revolvers ready for the hand.

The door opened and the young detective entered.

In spite of his seeing so many different people, Captain Boland was at once struck with the appearance of his visitor.

"Be seated, sir, and say how I can serve you."

"Sit there, please."

The youth obeyed and returned:

"You are Captain Boland?"

"I am, sir, at your service."

"May I ask if you know of a robbery of jewelry and money that has occurred of late from the Elite Hotel?"

"You refer to the loss of the Dunlap jewels?"

"Yes, sir."

"It is not certain that it was a robbery, or if it occurred at the Elite Hotel."

"I am certain of it, sir."

"Ah! produce the thief and the jewels, and you can claim the reward of five thousand dollars."

"I can produce both thief and jewels, or surely the latter, and I have come to consult with you to see if you do not think I am correct in my surmise as to the robber."

"I will be glad to aid you all in my power, sir; but I have not yet had the pleasure of knowing your name."

"Edgar Dumont."

"You are not a New Yorker?"

"No, sir; I only arrived in New York early this morning."

"And came about the Dunlap affair?"

"On the contrary, I knew nothing of it until I arrived."

"May I ask where you are from?"

"Late from Mexico, Captain Boland, but I have been a frontiersman for the past few years."

"Pardon me, but may I ask you why you are here?"

"Certainly, for there is no reason to hide anything."

"I am from Texas, my father having been a ranchero of wealth in that State."

"He was killed, and his fortune went, no one knew just how, or where, so I set out to seek my fortune, became a scout, a miner, and then a member of the Rocky Mountain Detectives."

"I learned by accident of something that led me to believe that I could find my father's murderer in Mexico, so I went there, spent nearly all my money in the search, and found that the man I sought had come to New York."

"I took the steamer here, and arrived to-day."

"That is my story, sir."

"I thank you for your frankness, Mr. Dumont, and since you mention your name may say that I have heard that General Dave Cook, the chief of the Rocky Mountain Detectives had in his command a youth who was noted for his daring and clever work, and won the name of Detective Dumont, the Man of Mystery."

"Are you that person, sir?"

"Yes, sir, the boys called me so."

"I am glad to know you, sir; but now to your discovery of this Dunlap affair?"

"I put up at the Elite Hotel, and was given room 149."

"I was looking out of the window, and leaned far over to see a tally-ho coach that passed, when I discovered something on the upper ledge of the window beneath me."

"I drew it up, and found it to be a silk handkerchief containing money and jewelry."

"I said the monogram and initials on the watches, and the initials and a crest embroidered upon the handkerchief, so I went down to the register and discovered that Mr. and Mrs. Murray Dunlap of Mobile Alabama had occupied room 145 one week before."

"I also discovered that at the same time a gentleman from New York had the room next door, the one I have."

"I learned from the clerk that Mr. Dunlap and his wife were still in the city at the home of their friend Doctor Richard Salter, and that the gentleman who had had my room was a guest of the Whip and Spur Club, and was supposed to be rich."

"I returned to my room, wrote something on a sheet of paper, slipped it beneath the door of the next room and seeking the chambermaid asked her to let me get it, leaving her to suppose the wind had blown it under the door."

"Upon entering the room I saw that the door locked on that side, was a slide door and had a bureau against it."

"I saw this at a glance, got the slip of paper and returned."

"I had found on the floor of my room, under the table, this instrument, which please tell me the use of."

He handed over the tool to the chief, who looked at it most carefully and shook his head.

"I cannot tell you, sir."

The youth stepped to the door, took out the key, put it on the other side, and with the instrument coolly locked and then unlocked the door.

The chief's impassable face showed surprise at this, but he asked:

"And how did you make the discovery of what this instrument was for?"

"It flashed upon me suddenly, as I was pondering over the matters, and I tried it, and the result was what you have just seen."

"I unlocked the door between the rooms, slid it back and could put my hands on any part of the bureau's marble top by moving the mirror, which swings on a pivot."

"I then decided that the jewels had been taken from there, by the one who had occupied the one I had, the one night that Mr. and Mrs. Dunlap had stopped at the hotel."

"This person I traced to the Whip and Spur Club, gave the butler my last ten dollars, and got from him the fact that the individual was a popular gentleman about town, had inherited a large fortune, but had almost, if not quite, swamped himself, and had returned from Europe on such a date."

"I went to the steamer's office, saw his name and the Dunlaps', and so decided that he was my man."

"I took a cab and drove to Doctor Richard Salter's, and found that Mr. Dunlap had gone down-town."

"I asked to see his wife, and she told me just what had been lost, but was not sure whether to blame the hotel or the steamer, though she thought she had put the things in her sachet and taken them with her."

"It was a small hand-sachet, she said, with her toilet articles, and she had placed it on the bureau, and found that the things were missing in the morning."

"The next room, she said, had been occupied by a gentleman they had met on the Arago coming over, but had been locked."

"I came to the conclusion that that gentleman was the thief, so sought you, as my cabman told me of you."

"Such is my story, sir, and here are the jewels and money intact."

He placed the handkerchief with its valuables before the chief, who remarked:

"Mr. Dumont, you have done the cleverest piece of detective work in a few hours that I ever knew of."

"I do not know what your intentions are for the future; but I now offer you a place with me and the pay of a special, first-class man."

"And I accept the place, sir," was the prompt reply, "for I am, I may say, dead broke, and was intending to sell my traps to get back West on, as, without money, I knew I could not find the man I was on the trail of."

"I will help you in that too; but this handkerchief bears the initials and crest of a gentleman I know—Mr. Lance Eagle."

"Yes, sir, he is the man who stole that property," was the cool response of the young detective.

CHAPTER XVIII.

IN THE TOILS.

"MR. DUMONT," said Chief Boland, after he had pondered awhile on what he heard:

"Let me tell you that it has come to me of late of several questionable things that Mr. Lance Eagle has been guilty of doing."

"One of them is a charge made by a pawnbroker."

"It seems that Mr. Eagle had been in the habit of pawning every month or two some valuable diamond jewelry that had belonged to his mother."

"They were in cases, and as he regularly took them out, paying the large interest demanded, the pawnbroker ceased to examine them when handed in."

"The last time, just before he sailed for Europe, he pawned the things, and on his return went to redeem them, and in looking them over saw that the diamonds had been taken out and imitation jewels put in their stead."

"The pawnbroker vowed he knew nothing about it, but to hush up the matter compromised by paying half the amount, some fifteen hundred dollars, to Eagle; but he came to me and asked to have a detective put on the track of the young man."

"I find that he is heavily in debt, has no money, gambles and dissipates, and, all put together, it does look as though he was guilty."

"Now I'll give you a letter to one of my friends in the club, asking him to show you every courtesy, and I'll supply you with funds needed."

"Remain at your hotel, but go and buy a nobby outfit and pretend to be a rich young Texan ranchero."

"My friend will make you at home at the club, introduce you to Eagle, whom you are to cultivate, and I am sure it will not take you long to find him out."

"I will write to Mr. Dunlap in the mean time, asking him not to return South just yet, and telling him his goods are safe, but not to speak of it to any one."

"Now, Mr. Dumont, let me again express my pleasure in meeting you, and expect me to see you at your hotel this evening, and I will bring my friend, who will at once take you to the club, so you must be in trim."

Thus the two parted, and that evening, handsomely dressed, and with several hundred dollars in his pocket, Edgar Dumont found himself the guest of the Whip and Spur Club.

"Who is that handsome man, Mr. Gayfer?" he asked of Mr. Hammond Gayfer, the rich young merchant to whom the detective chief had introduced him.

"His name is a strange one, for it is Launcelot Eagle, though every one knows him as Lance Eagle, and he so signs himself."

"He is a wild one, and spends money like a prince."

"Would you like to meet him?"

"Yes, thank you, for I am struck with his appearance."

"He is talking to two gentlemen from the South to whom he presented me last night."

"Their names are Murray and George Dunlap, I believe; and they are friends of one of our noted physicians, Doctor Salter; but I will let Eagle present you, for they are clever fellows, and one of them has just met with a very heavy loss by being robbed of jewels belonging to his wife, and money of his own."

They crossed over to where Lance Eagle stood and Hammond Gayfer presented his friend.

Eagle received him with warm cordiality, introduced his two friends, the Messrs. Dunlap, and the party sat down at a table for a glass of wine together.

Soon after a game of cards was proposed by Lance Eagle, and Edgar Dumont played with him, and when he had left the club that night he had lost a hundred dollars by the game.

The next day Edgar Dumont told the chief that he had observed Lance Eagle had slyly changed the pack of cards handed to him by the steward, and he had slipped one out of the number.

The two men examined it and found it marked.

Thus two weeks passed away, and Lance Eagle and the young Texan had become inseparable companions.

One night at a late hour the detective chief dropped into the Whip and Spur Club.

Edgar Dumont and Lance Eagle were in a private room playing cards.

The detective chief was accompanied by a friend and they entered the room.

"Mr. Eagle, I am sorry that it is my duty to arrest you; but here is my warrant, and you are my prisoner!"

Lance Eagle sprang to his feet at the words of the chief, and the companion of the latter seized the cards.

"My God! there is some mistake," cried the prisoner.

"None, sir, for I arrest you on a number of charges, the principal one being that you robbed Mr. and Mrs. Dunlap, and, in some way dropped your booty out of the window and believed it had fallen on the pavement and been picked up by some one before you could get down to the street and get it."

"I need say no more, sir, and I advise you to create no scene, for it will only be the worse for you."

The man seemed crushed, and sinking into his seat buried his face in his hands.

Half an hour after he was in a cell in the Tombs.

But he never came to trial, for in some mysterious way he escaped and disappeared beyond all efforts to find him.

But Mr. and Mrs. Dunlap received back their jewels and money, and Edgar Dumont would only accept as a reward one thousand dollars, which he said he would some day return if fortune favored him.

CHAPTER XIX.

WESTWARD HO!

WHEN Miss Cara Maynell came down to breakfast, after she had been called by Allene, she found Mr. St. John awaiting her and with him the detective chief and the officer he had sent for.

The governess had expected to find in Captain Jack Boland an ordinary person, but had been agreeably surprised to discover him to be a gentleman of intelligence and courtly in manners as a Chesterfield.

She now met with another surprise, though prepared, from what Allene had told her, to see a handsome youth.

He was youthful in appearance it was true, at first glance quite boyish; but a close look showed a face of great strength, and one, that for its good looks would have been stern and resolute to a very great degree.

He was dressed in black that was almost clerical in appearance and bowed low when presented to the governess.

"Miss Maynell, I need hardly tell you that Mr. Edgar Dumont is Captain Boland's choice to take in hand your case," said Mr. St. John.

Miss Maynell bowed, and though, with Mr. St. John she thought him rather young for so dangerous and important a work, she had heard the chief's story of him, as given the night before and felt that he fully carried out the praise bestowed upon him by his captain.

The four now went in to breakfast, where Mrs. St. John and Allene awaited them, and the young detective was presented to the other ladies, while Miss Maynell gave a sly glance at her pupil as the handsome hero bowed low when introduced.

Mrs. St. John even was charmed with the young detective, who was so easy in manner, and though modest in mien proved himself very entertaining.

After breakfast the party adjourned to the library and the whole facts of the case were placed before Edgar Dumont.

He listened attentively, asked questions occasionally, and made a few notes here and there.

Then he went over the plans of his chief and when he was in the possession of the full facts of the case, Captain Boland said:

"I have told Mrs. St. John and Miss Maynell, that you will carry out this work to a successful termination, Dumont."

"I can try," was the modest response.

"You will undertake it then, Mr. Dumont?"

"Certainly, Miss Maynell."

"Mr. St. John will arrange with you all pecuniary matters."

"It will not be so very expensive, for working in the mines is not like city work where there is some one to pay at every turn."

"My personal expenses and pay will be about all, as I now see it, Miss Maynell."

"The work will be most perilous, and you certainly will need aid, so I beg you not to spare expense to ferret out the mystery, at least as far as the money I have will go."

"The danger I am accustomed to, and I know just what I will have to face, as I have been through that very country."

"Indeed! then we have been most fortunate in securing your services," said Mr. St. John.

"Have you an idea of your plan, Dumont?" asked Captain Boland.

"To take the train to-night and go as far as I can by rail, there taking the stage early to the nearest point to the mines."

"I can there purchase a good horse, and I have my own saddle, bridle, arms and outfit, so will only need to rig out as a miner."

"I will go into the mining-country as a prospector for a lead, and leave the rest to circumstances."

"You do not think that you had better take some one to aid you, for I will cheerfully pay the extra expense?"

"No, for a man unaccustomed to border life would but be in my way, and what assistance I may need I can get it there, Miss Maynell," was the response.

So it was arranged, and as no train went down to the city before late in the afternoon, Captain Boland and his young ally were left to the family to entertain.

This they did not find at all hard to do, for Edgar Dumont had a fine voice and sung Spanish songs learned in Mexico, accompanying himself upon Allene's guitar, and afterward showed all a specimen of his wondrous marksmanship with revolver and rifle.

After lunch Allene went with Dumont for a gallop through the hills and all noted the superb seat of the young Texan in his saddle, as he sprung upon a spirited animal which the merchant had bought for himself, but found too wild for him to ride.

The Texan managed him with perfect ease, and, as Allene dropped her riding-whip, when they started to ride off, he wheeled quickly, swung low from his saddle and picked it up while on a canter, again placing himself by the side of the young girl ere she had reined her horse to a halt.

With many good wishes for his success, Edgar Dumont left Wildlands that afternoon, having made friends of every one beneath the roof of the hospitable merchant, and that night he was flying along westward on his mission of danger to solve the mystery hanging over the Maynell-Delorme Mine.

And, as Allene laid her pretty head upon her pillow that night, she muttered to herself:

"Folks say girls can't love, but I guess I can."

CHAPTER XX.

TWO PARDS.

THE reader will recall that when the Vagabond of the Mines lost the trail of the horseman, whose life he had so nearly taken, he was about in despair.

He had struggled so hard, suffered so much, and risked life so persistently to be avenged upon Leonard Delorme that he felt that he fully deserved all the pecuniary benefit he could derive from his death.

He did not know, it will be remembered, that he owed it to the conscience of Leonard Delorme that he had been pardoned by Governor Sprague, nor was he aware that his enemy had him on his list as one, to be paid back, with full interest, every dollar he had gotten from him and squandered.

Had he known what the conscience of Leonard Delorme had prompted him to do, when he had placed himself beyond danger of arrest for his crime, and had won a fortune from the earth, he would never have dogged him to death, or fired that fatal shot.

But, not knowing this, he had been a blood-hound upon his trail, where, otherwise, the

Vagabond might have been willing to forgive what he had suffered by imprisonment, and that for his life, and become again his friend.

But unfortunately for both men the Vagabond of the Mines knew not what the conscience-stricken Delorme had done, and arranged to do, as an act of justice, so tracked him to his doom.

From what he had heard Larry the miner say that night in camp, he knew that Delorme had with him the papers that located his mine, and so ye had seen another get there.

That other he had, in the venom of his hatred, sought to kill, but, as has been seen, had failed.

When wounded, the horse of Borden Branch had not carried him toward the mine of Leonard Delorme, and not knowing the dazed condition of the man he trailed, the Vagabond of the Mines had supposed that he was not going to the mine.

Hence, when he lost the trail of Borden Branch, by its being washed out by the storm, he thought that this man had another destination in view than Delorme's mine.

Wet through, reduced to the smallest quantity of food, his horse broken down, he decided upon one course, and that was, as has been seen, to go to the mine and await developments.

He reached thereto find Borden Branch in possession.

He at once determined to find a convenient camp and begin operations against the man that stood between him and fortune.

But human nature had stood all that it was possible even for his iron frame, and he found himself bursting up with fever.

He remembered going to look for a camp, but he remembered no more, for his horse took his own way, and that way was back to the nearest mining-camps.

The man simply remained in his saddle.

He was delirious, but the movement of the horse seemed to keep him from throwing himself upon the ground.

The horse went on until night came.

Then he stopped at a stream and quenched his thirst, after which he fed on the grass near by.

As his rider did not dismount, the animal moved on, instinct guiding him along the trail.

He halted again at dawn, drank, and cropped grass.

Still the rider held his seat, moaning at times, then chattering away glibly to himself, then laughing aloud, but all the time burning up with fever.

The horse moved on all through the day, and at night halted before a miner's cabin.

Two men sat there smoking their pipes and talking.

It was Sunday, and they had been brought up to respect the day, so they did so.

They saw the horseman coming, and they loosened their weapons in their belt for service.

These were perilous times, and every man was a foe until he proved himself a friend.

But soon they saw the sorry plight of the horse and rider.

The animal was thin and tired-looking, and the trappings were not worth a dollar.

The rider was flushed with fever, his eyes sunk far back in his head and bright as stars, the cheeks drawn in and the whole face and form that of a human being in deepest misery.

His old weapons hung from his saddle, and he had not a particle of food left, while his clothes were in tatters.

A more pitiable sight could scarce be conceived than was this poor Vagabond of the Mines.

His horse halted before the cabin and gave a low neigh, his appeal for release from his burden.

The rider said nothing, but looked in mute appeal at the two men.

His misery touched their hearts.

"Quick, Ned, for ther poor feller is dyin' I fears," cried one.

"It are ther Vagabond o ther Mines, Bob," the other said.

But they lifted him from his horse, laid him upon the ground, and began to care for him as tenderly as though he had been their own brother.

He was given a cot in the cabin, clean clothes were put upon him, and one of the miners, who had a small case of medicines, gave him what he deemed best to break his fever.

The horse was then cared for, and the two miners found their humanity taxed by a fellow-being left upon their hands, and one who was delirious with fever and unable to help himself.

The next morning one man went to the mine to work, the other remained at the cabin as nurse.

Thus they took turns, and the days passed into weeks, and nearly a month went by before the Vagabond was out of danger.

His recovery was slow, but he gave no trouble.

He begged the two miners to leave him alone, and they did so.

As he grew stronger, he did all in his power to help.

He had their noonday meal and supper ready for their return, the cabin was kept in perfect order, and he did all in his power to show his appreciation of their devotion to him.

He had only asked how he came there, and what he had said in his delirium.

They had told him how his horse had brought him up to the door of the cabin, but they said he had muttered words to himself which they could not understand more of than:

"Before Heaven, judge and gentlemen of the jury, I am not guilty of this murder."

This was all that they had heard.

He seemed relieved at their words, but made no reply, no explanation.

His horse had thrived by rest and food and was doing well.

The miners told the Vagabond they would give him a home and wages if he would work for them.

"How long was I ill?" he had asked.

"Thirty seven days in all."

"Then you lost that number of days by your kindness to me?"

"Don't speak of it, pard," said both men.

"I'll work for you," he said and he began upon his duties.

These were to get up early and get breakfast, then set the cabin to rights and come to the mine for a couple of hours' work.

Then he returned to get dinner, and after dinner spent several hours in the mines, when he went back to the cabin and cooked supper.

This enabled the miners to make up for lost time.

On the thirty-seventh day of his work, he did not come to the mine after dinner.

When the miners returned to the cabin earlier than usual, as they felt anxious about him, they found a slip of paper pegged on the door.

It read as follows:

"PARDS:—You did a noble part by me, and I have tried to return it as best I can."

"To-day ends my work for you, and makes up the time lost by your devoted nursing of me during my long illness.

"I draw no wages from you, but give my services free to repay you; but I do take from your shelf a little gold dust, about twenty dollars' worth I think, and provisions to last me a week."

"This dust and the value of the provisions I hope some day to repay you, and perhaps I may be able to further prove my appreciation of your goodness to me."

"Some day I trust we may meet again."

"Once more thanking you, I say good-by."

"ROCKS, THE VAGABOND."

Such was the note left by the Vagabond, who had merely departed, taking with him only his weapons, horse and the dust and the provisions stated.

Whither he had gone the miners could not tell.

CHAPTER XXI.

AGAIN ON THE TRAIL.

IT had been a long while since Rocks the Vagabond had been seen in the valley mining-camps.

His "fit" was remembered, and many supposed he had gone off and died somewhere in the mountains.

But one morning he put in an appearance in the valley.

He looked better in the face than when he had last been seen, but his apparel was none the better for extra wear, and his old weapons were about the same.

His horse did look much improved, however, and showed signs of a long rest and good care.

Silent as before, the Vagabond simply nodded to those he met and knew, just as though he had seen them the day before, and when asked as to where he had been, simply replied:

"In the mountains."

He made his way to the store of the mining-camp, purchased some ammunition for his rifle and pistol, got a haversack of provisions, a miner's shirt, pair of shoes, and mounting his horse rode away.

It was Sunday in the camps, and many of the miners were loafing about, or resting at their calms.

Of course the return of the Vagabond became a general subject of discussion, and many won-

lered where he had been and what he had been about.

There was one man at the store when the Vagabond made his purchases.

He had never seen the Vagabond with money, or its equivalent, before.

This seemed to prove that he had been where he could get gold.

How much he had the man did not know; but he supposed the Vagabond had found a mine, or struck it rich somehow.

The appearance of his horse indicated a rest, and so that rest must have been obtained while the rider was digging gold.

This man, so interested in the Vagabond all of a sudden, was a worthless sort of a fellow, working only when he had to do so, and gambling and drinking whenever he earned a few dollars ahead.

He answered to the name of Black Bill, from the fact that his hair and beard were jet black, and his face was as dark as a Spaniard's; but his eyes were bright blue, the contrast giving him an evil look.

Having made his purchases, the Vagabond left the mining-camp a short while before sunset.

He went up the valley, and after an hour's ride halted on a hill-top that looked back over the trail.

His eyes fell upon the form of a horse and rider.

What business had any man coming up that trail, unless to follow him, for there were no cabins that way, no mines.

He would be careful.

It was nearly sunset, and he must soon go into camp for the night.

He remembered that he had seen Black Bill watching him when he made his purchases at the store, and he gazed intently at the coming horseman.

From where he had halted he was concealed by a thicket, but he had a good view of the trail.

"It is Black Bill.

"He thinks I have struck a lead, and he intends to follow me.

"Well, forewarned is forearmed, and he has made a mistake."

He rode on, a strange expression on his face, and soon after halted behind a large rock.

Slowly along the trail came Black Bill.

The Vagabond had several times, on purpose to try the man following him, turned from the trail, and in each case he noted the fact that Black Bill did the same.

There was no doubt but that he was on his track, and the Vagabond knew his man.

Black Bill was known to be a murderer, as well as a rascal, and he held life cheap.

If there was something to gain by killing the Vagabond, the latter knew that he had no compunctions of conscience about doing so.

He would kill without mercy to benefit himself even so little.

So the Vagabond halted behind the boulder, looked to his weapons and lariated his horse out, after which he hid in a clump of pines near.

He wished Black Bill to come suddenly upon his horse and suppose he had gone into camp for the night.

The tracker would doubtless think the Vagabond was gathering wood to cook his supper with.

Up rode Black Bill, drew rein quickly as he saw the horse, and then dismounting, unslung his rifle and began to look about him.

The Vagabond needed nothing more to convince him that the desperado was seeking his life.

He was protected by a rock, and hidden by a thicket, though he could see Black Bill distinctly.

His rifle was leveled at the desperado, and his revolver lay on the rock right at his hand.

"Hands up, Black Bill."

The desperado started.

He saw that he was entrapped, and a borderman for years he knew what "hands up" meant, when the one who gave the command had the drop on him.

The rifle of the desperado was dropped at his feet and up went the hands of Black Bill as the Vagabond of the Mines stepped from the thicket.

CHAPTER XXII.

TWO SHOTS.

THE moment that the Vagabond of the Mines stepped out of the thicket, Black Bill supposed that he would kill him.

It was just what the desperado would have done to the Vagabond, so he judged the man by

himself; but he showed the coward in his nature and at once began to beg for his life.

"Now, Rocks, how have I injured you that you get the drop on me?"

"Let up, pard, fer that durned old rat-trap of a rifle o' yours mou't go off when you wasn't intendin' fer kill me."

"Black Bill, I did intend to kill you, to shoot you down without one atom of mercy, for you were following my trail to kill me, as I have watched you trailing me, and know."

"But I don't wish to shoot you down like a dog, so if you will solemnly swear not to follow me from this spot, I will let you go; but still I shall be on the watch for you, should you break your oath."

"I'll swear, Rocks, and not break my vow nuther."

"Then kneel."

The desperado dropped quickly upon his knees.

"Now Black Bill swear by your mother's memory that you will not track me from this spot, but return at once to the camps, so help you Heaven," said the Vagabond of the Mines impressively.

"I swear!" said the desperado, still on his knees and with his hands uplifted above his head.

"Mount your horse and go, as soon as I have emptied your weapon and taken your ammunition."

This the Vagabond did, and returning the empty rifle and revolvers to the desperado he said:

"Go!"

Black Bill needed no second bidding but threw himself across his saddle and rode quickly away without uttering a word.

The Vagabond then mounted his horse and rode on his way, but soon turned off the trail and sought a camping place for the night.

He built a fire, cooked his frugal supper and was soon fast asleep wrapped in his blankets.

He was up with the dawn and on his way, and his destination was the Maynell-Delorme Mine.

He reached the vicinity of the mine the next day, and hiding his horse in a canyon went forward on foot to reconnoiter.

In his former experience in the vicinity he had learned the trails and the lay of the land, and he gained a position from whence he could obtain a view of the cabin of the miner.

A curl of blue smoke coming from the chimney told him that the miners had not left the place, and he decided to go back to his horse, make him secure for the night and then creep up to a position opposite to the cabin door.

When the dawn broke and the miner came forth he could shoot him down, for toward this man, who stood between himself and fortune, the Vagabond Miner had no mercy.

He reached his horse and took him to a secure place, and was just about to dismount when the crack of a rifle was heard and the horse fell forward, throwing his rider heavily to the ground.

At the same instant a man dashed up to him and was about to fire his revolver down upon the half-stunned Vagabond, when a shot was heard and the new-comer sunk in his tracks.

The Vagabond staggered to his feet and glanced about him in a vacant sort of way.

At his feet was the form of Black Bill, who had broken his oath and followed him, and a bullet had cut its way across his forehead.

Then from a thicket near by advanced a tall form with bearded face.

"My friend, I hope you are not seriously hurt by your fall, though your horse is dead, I see."

"I tried to fire sooner, but could not get an aim through the bushes at that fellow."

The Vagabond shrunk back from his preserver with a cry of terror, his face became livid, and throwing out his hands as though to ward off an impending danger, he reeled and fell in a fit of unconsciousness.

"Poor fellow, he is really badly hurt, I fear."

"I will bear him to my cabin."

The speaker raised the form in his strong arms and bore it away through the timber.

It was no easy task, but at last he reached his cabin, and placing the still unconscious man upon his cot, began to restore him as best he could.

The Vagabond revived after a while, and glanced about him with a peculiar look upon his face.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"Only a miner, my friend; but you are better, I am glad to see, and you will soon be all right, for your bones are not fractured."

"You saved my life!"

"Well, yes; I fired upon your intended slayer."

"Who was he?"

"A large man, with black hair and beard—"

"Black Bill!" eagerly cried the Vagabond.

"Doubtless you will know him when you see him, for you seemed dazed when I got to you."

"Where is he?"

"I left him for dead where he fell."

"And I owe my life to you!"

"How strange!" and the Vagabond rubbed his hand across his head in a peculiar way.

"There is nothing strange about it, my friend, for this is my horse, and I lighted a fire for supper, and then took a run out in the timber to get some game."

"I saw your danger, and as my sympathies are always with the man in danger and misfortune, I fired at him."

"Now I will go and get your traps and bring them here, after which I will bury your enemy."

"I will go with you, for I am well able to do so."

"If you insist."

"I do."

They left the cabin together and went toward the spot where the Vagabond had so nearly lost his life.

A cry broke from the lips of the Vagabond as he saw that the man who had fired upon him had gone.

There was a red stain upon the rocks where he had fallen, and by the crimson drops they followed his trail to where he had left his horse, several hundred yards distant.

The tracks of the horse were there, but the animal and his master had disappeared.

"It is useless to follow him with night coming on, and I think he has had a lesson that will keep him away from your trail, so let us return for your traps and go to the cabin," said the miner.

This they did, and the meager possessions of the Vagabond were taken from his dead horse and carried to the miner's cabin.

On the way some game was shot, and the two sat down to a substantial supper that night, soon after which the Vagabond retired for the night on a bed made for him by his host, for the poor fellow seemed to suffer from his fall in spite of his assurance to the contrary.

CHAPTER XXII.

A SECOND TOO LATE.

ROY ROCKFORD, or as he has been more generally called in these pages, the Vagabond of the Mines, was more badly bruised than he at first thought, for the next morning he was stiff and sore, and, at the suggestion of the miner, remained in bed.

Two or three days passed away, and the Vagabond was again himself.

A man of his endurance and physique, was not easily broken down, so he rallied quickly from what would have laid many a man up for a month.

But his mind was sorely troubled.

He had come there with the avowed purpose of killing the man who held the mine, the one who had stepped into the shoes of Leonard Delorme.

He believed that, with the papers of Delorme in his possession, the mine as his own, he had at once appropriated everything for himself.

Borden Branch therefore stood to him as the representative of the dead man, and he was therefore considered by Roy Rockford as his fair game.

In the moment of his success as he believed, Black Bill had called him to a halt.

Black Bill had fired at him, but had miscalculated somewhat and sent the bullet into the head of the horse instead of the rider.

Running upon his foe while half-stunned and down, his end would have been quick and certain but for the timely shot of the miner.

The nature of Roy Rockford was a strong one, and he was not the man to raise hand against the miner, to whom he owed his life.

About himself the miner had asked him not a question, during the few days he had been with him, nor had he questioned his preserver.

He felt strangely drawn toward the man, for himself as much as that he owed him his life.

There was something about Borden Branch to win friendship and respect, and the Vagabond began to wonder whether such a man could be guilty of appropriating the mine of Leonard Delorme to his own use, be he ever so needy.

One day, a week after his coming, the Vagabond took the rifle of the miner, and started for a stroll in the hills for a shot at a deer.

He had barely reached a point above the can-

yon, when he saw a human form not a hundred yards away.

The man was Black Bill, as a second look revealed.

He was peering over the cliff down into the canyon, and his rifle was in his hand.

The Vagabond knew that from his position the eyes of Black Bill rested upon the miner, whom he had left seated in front of his cabin.

Then the desperado's rifle went up to his shoulder, and at the same instant the Vagabond pulled trigger.

The two rifles flashed within a second of each other.

When the smoke drifted from before his eyes, the Vagabond saw that Black Bill was gone.

He ran hastily to where he had stood, and peered over into the canyon.

There lay the form of the desperado all in a heap and motionless.

The fall would have killed him, had not the bullet of the Vagabond done so.

But another sight met his eyes that brought a cry from his lips.

He saw that Black Bill's aim had also been true, for the miner lay upon the ground where he had fallen from his seat.

Hastily the Vagabond made his way down into the cabin, and to the side of the miner, whose eyes met his own.

"Thank Heaven you are not dead!"

"But I killed him," he cried.

"Then you did not—"

"Oh, no! no! don't wrong me."

"Yonder lies Black Bill, and I fired upon him as he shot at you."

"Would that I could have shot an instant sooner."

"Forgive me, my friend, for I wronged you."

The eyes closed, and the Vagabond feared that the miner was dead.

But he rallied, and was taken to his cot, his clothing cut away and the wound examined.

The bullet had entered the right side, and ranged downward, having been shot from a lofty height.

A search revealed that it had glanced on the hip bone and cut its way out.

It might be fatal, and yet there might be a chance of recovery.

The miner, having had experience in surgery, diagnosed his own wound, and said:

"It is impossible to say now what internal injury has been done; but we must soon know."

Then he gave instructions to the Vagabond just what to do for him, and he was made as comfortable as was possible in that lone place.

Then the Vagabond went out of the cabin and with pick and shovel dug a grave for Black Bill.

His weapons, and what else he possessed, he appropriated, and going off on his trail found the horse of the desperado and turned him in the canyon with the animals of the miner, and which had been made into a secure corral that was a good pasture by felling trees here and there at open places.

The Vagabond then returned to the cabin and found the wounded miner asleep.

When he awoke it was late in the night, and he was restless with fever, and began to talk at random.

The Vagabond began to fear the worst, but he was a good nurse and devoted himself by day and night to the wounded man.

The miner's little case of medicines came in well, and Roy Rockford understood enough of the use of drugs to aid the sufferer all he could.

When Borden Branch slept, he would go out and kill some game, bring wood and water, and do what cooking was necessary; but when the patient was awake, whether it was day or night, he was constantly by his side.

The wounds, where the bullet entered and cut its way out were carefully dressed, and the patient was kept as still as possible.

As the days passed and the wounds progressed well, the fever abated and one day Borden Branch awoke with a clear mind.

He glanced around him curiously, and his eyes fell upon the face of his faithful nurse, now pale and haggard from constant attendance.

"I have been sick," he said.

"Yes, you were wounded by Black Bill."

"I remember."

"Was it yesterday?"

"No; but you are doing well, and must keep quiet."

"Are you ill?"

"No, indeed."

"You look badly."

"I am all right; but you must not talk, or you will bring on your fever again."

"I have had fever then?"

"Yes."

"Tell me how long I have been ill and I will ask no more."

"Nearly a month."

The wounded man gave a slight start, but taking the glass of water handed to him, drank it and sunk to sleep.

He slept for hours and awoke much refreshed. Feeling his pulse, he said:

"The wound was not fatal, and I will get well; but I owe it, sir, to your devoted nursing."

"You have not told me your name."

"I am known as the Vagabond of the Mines," was the reply, in a bitter tone.

"You have another?"

"Yes, my name is Roy Rockford."

"Roy Rockford! Roy Rockford! how strange, how very strange," and thus saying the name and words over and over again, the wounded man sunk again into a deep sleep.

When he awoke the Vagabond had a good cup of deer soup prepared for him, and the miner ate with a relish, after which he said:

"You have saved my life, Mr. Roy Rockford, and I have something to say to you."

CHAPTER XXIV.

THE DISCOVERY.

MORE than a week passed away, and Borden Branch improved steadily.

He was very weak, and the Vagabond plotted and planned continually to get him up tempting meals, and it was no easy task to vary the bill of fare from such a meager supply.

Deer meat, birds or squirrel, with rice, crackers, hoe-cakes, and coffee were all the standbys, and yet the Vagabond managed to keep up the supply and vary it considerably.

At last the miner was able to move about.

The wounds were healed and gave him no pain, and his health was improving; but he was still very much emaciated and weak.

One night the two men sat together in the cabin, before a cheerful fire, for the nights were growing chilly.

Neither had spoken for some time, and the miner broke the silence with:

"So your name is Roy Rockford?"

"Yes, sir."

"There can hardly be two men of that name."

"I never heard of any other."

"You are from the East?"

"Yes."

"Do you know that I have that name at the head of a list?"

"At the head of what kind of a list?" asked the Vagabond in surprise.

"A list of names."

"I am at a loss to understand," and the Vagabond began to grow uneasy, his face flushing and paling by turns.

"Let us understand each other, Mr. Rockford, for you are the man I want."

The Vagabond grew more and more anxious, and his voice dropped to a hoarse whisper as he asked:

"The man you want?"

"Yes."

"What for?"

"You seem worried, and it is not my wish to give you pain; but do you know a man by the name of Leonard Delorme?"

"Leonard Delorme!" and with the utterance of the name he sprung to his feet. "Do I know him? Yes! I know him but too well."

"He is dead, and—"

"Miner Branch, let me tell you what I know of Leonard Delorme," and the words of the man rung now, while his eyes flashed.

"That man was my friend, and I loved him as I would a brother."

"He was my senior in years, but we were much together."

"He was rich and enjoyed life with a fortune left him by his parents."

"I was comparatively poor, had a good situation however, and had saved up a few thousands."

"I gave it to Delorme as others gave him their all, to invest, and I found that he had speculated, or spent in wild extravagance all he had, and every cent of my money and that of others too."

"My mother had a little home, and my situation paid me well, so I did not despair, and I forgave Delorme the wrong done me."

"But one night a murder was committed—a rich gentleman, supposed to have a large sum of money with him was murdered, and a strange fatality turned suspicion upon me."

"I could not prove an *alibi*. Circumstantial evidence pointed to my guilt, and I was tried, found guilty and would have been hanged but that my sentence was changed to imprisonment for life."

"I went to prison a crushed, a broken-hearted

man, and from that day my mother began to break down."

"To my amazement some three years ago I was pardoned by the governor: yes, pardoned, mind you, for a crime I had not been guilty of."

"I went to my home, and arrived just in time to see my mother die."

"You will think it strange, as I did, when I tell you that my mother, dying as she was, had a dream, and in that dream saw the murderer of Carl Caradine, and she told me who it was."

"I was horrified, but I knew when I heard who it was, that there could be no mistake, for a thousand little things, before never thought of, came to me to prove the truth of that dream."

"It was Leonard Delorme, and I knew that the man who had robbed me, had slain Carl Caradine, and, to save himself, had sacrificed me."

"He had brought untold misery upon me, had caused my mother to die of a broken heart, and, the day I was pardoned, I vowed to be avenged upon him."

"I sold my little home, sought to find him, and tracked him West."

"I was a long time upon the trail, my money gave out, and I sold my fine horse and arms, in fact everything, for I would not beg, and still kept on his track."

"I followed him here the day he departed for the East, and—well, you know that I killed him, and you know that I also shot at you."

"I did not kill you, thank God! but I came here to do so, and—why need I say more, for you know all."

"My poor unfortunate friend, you have indeed suffered terribly; but let me tell you, cruelly as Leonard Delorme wronged you, he was not as bad as you deemed him."

"I never met him until the day he was killed."

"I came here to the West with a shadow upon my heart, not to seek a fortune, for I have one; but I loved this roving life of solitude and peril."

"To me, when dying, Delorme intrusted the secret of his mine, yet did not tell me all."

"He told me he had wronged some, and wished to atone, so he gave me a list of names, and I was to pay to them, with full legal interest to date, the amount opposite each name."

"One name was that of the daughter of the discoverer of this mine, and she was to get half of its panning out, the other half to go to me, after I had paid the claims on the list."

"Your name was there, and opposite the sum of five thousand dollars, with date of loan and interest at ten per cent., which now brings it up to nearly eight thousand dollars."

"When you fired upon me, for I now know that you did so, and bear, you see, your scar, I was stunned, and my horses went where they willed for an hour or so."

"But I came here, and, after finding all as Delorme had stated it to be, I counted up the dust on hand and saw that there was a goodly fortune indeed."

"I then wrote letters to each one whose name was on the list, asking them to send me a letter and affidavit of their identity, and asking where I should send a draft for the amount due them."

"I wrote to you, with the others, and to the heiress who is with me in the mine, and hearing from all but two, sent their money."

"It was time for me to hear from those two, yourself and the heiress, before I met you, and I was intending to go to the camps to get letters, when I was taken ill and detained a few weeks."

"Then, as I was preparing to start the next day, I met you, and so months have passed, and I suppose my fair correspondent cannot understand my delay in again writing her."

"Now, Mr. Rockford, I am ready to pay into your hands the amount due you to date, and then, as I am not able to travel, I must ask you to go to the camps and get my letters, at the same time mailing one explaining delay."

"When I shall have paid the heiress, her share to date, I will feel greatly relieved, I assure you."

The Vagabond had listened in deepest silence to all that the miner said, and when he had finished, he responded:

"Gladly will I serve you in any way, my dear friend, and I will start to-morrow, for you are well enough for me to leave you alone."

"But poor Delorme! after all, he was not so bad, and now I know he is the one that got Governor Sprague to pardon me, for they were boys together; but the governor would tell me no more than that he had become assured of my innocence of the crime."

"I have a bitter grief to bear in my heart for taking the life of Leonard Delorme," and rising

quickly the Vagabond left the cabin and paced to and fro in the chill night air, his brain burning with bitter memories.

CHAPTER XXV.

A STRANGER IN THE CAMP.

THERE were a number of mining-camps, along the mountain range, where the Vagabond had so tirelessly tracked his foe.

Among these camps, was the one which the stage coach of the Overland passed through every two weeks, bringing the mail, or at least once a month, for the mails on those wild and perilous trails were by no means regular in those days.

This camp was known as Gold Dust City, and it was a distributing point for the other mining settlements.

It consisted of a few shanties, one of which was known as the Palace Hotel, and with as much propriety could be so called as could the camp be dubbed a city.

The Palace Hotel consisted of half a dozen shanties in a row, one being used as a store, and another for a bar and gambling saloon, while the other two did duty as a *hotel*, more properly called a lodging house.

The store had in it the post-office, and the landlord of the Palace hotel was also store-keeper, postmaster and ran the bar and gambling saloon, while he was also interested in mining, and consequently was a very important personage of Gold Dust city.

One afternoon the stage rolled up to the door of the Palace Hotel bringing a small mail-pouch and one passenger.

That passenger was a young man who had several sacks of baggage, instead of trunks or grips.

He sprung down from the box, where he had been acting as driver, for Josh Sloan, the driver, had one arm in a sling, and there was a red stain upon it, too, showing that there had been trouble of some kind on the road.

The young man entered the Palace Hotel, carrying his traps with him; and, well dressed, handsome, and with a free-and-easy air about him, he attracted general attention from those about the station.

"Who is he, Josh?" asked Buck Baldwin.

"Who are he?" and the driver gave the landlord a curious look.

"Yes, and what's ter pay, fer you're wounded?"

"Of course I is, fer I got shot in the arm; but thet pilgrim as who you axes who are he just tanned up the toes o' the road-stripper as give me thet wound; and more—it are through thet same chap that thet mails is saved, and our lives, too."

"Who is he?"

"Well, he's lightnin' on a tear."

"Tell us about it, Josh," cried half a dozen voices in chorus.

"Thar hain't much ter tell, 'cepting thet thet road-stripers jumped us, and a dozen strong, too, they war."

"Thet young gamecock war on the box with me, and at thet call o' hands up, he dropped thet feller as called thet words."

"Waal, they was tuk back, as I was, too; but he laid on thet silk and thet horses jumped ahead, and got ter goin' afore thet stripers c'u'd understand it."

"But, they larnt quick and let us have it hot, and I got it here as yer see, and I seen thet galoot as shot me."

"And Gamecock seen him, too, fer he just let him have it in thet center o' thet forehead, and then he laid on thet whip ag'n, and tuk thet reins from me, fer I were next to no good; that's how we is here."

The crowd at once went in to have a look at the stranger, while Jack Sloan went to "git doctored," as he said, for a miner who had been a physician lived not far from the hotel.

There was something in the look of the stranger that kept the hangers-on from being inquisitive as to his business in Gold Dust City, so they took it out in admiring him.

The next day, however, Buck Baldwin said the stranger was on a hunt for gold, had graduated at some college, said he knew a rock when he saw it, and was going to prospect for dust in the mountains.

He wanted to buy a good horse, and of course Buck had the very animal he needed, so a bargain was soon consummated.

But the young man spent a week in camp ere he departed on his gold-hunting, and before he left, as some of the loafers remarked, he and the landlord had become "thick as thieves and twice as friendly."

The stranger then started off on his gold-hunt, and he went well-prepared, for his outfit was

complete, only he declined the service of a guide.

He seemed to depend upon himself against all advice that somebody would kill him before many days.

If he, himself, had such an idea, it did not deter him from the purpose he had in view.

The stranger was none other than Edgar Dumont, the young detective. He certainly had begun his work well upon reaching Gold Dust City, for he had cultivated the landlord of the Palace Hotel, who was, in turn, both miner and postmaster, as well as storekeeper.

Of course, Baldwin knew all the gossip of the camps, as well as any man who had bought goods at his store in the past few years, or stopped at his hotel.

When he saw that Buck was to be trusted, Dumont let him into the secret that he was a detective, and wished all the information he could get of an old miner by the name of Maynell, another known as Leonard Delorme, and a third who had answered to the name of B. Borden.

The result of these inquiries were most gratifying to the young detective, for Landlord Buck, as the miners called him, told him that there were letters in his office for Leonard Delorme, B. Borden and Borden Branch.

He remembered that there had been an old miner by the name of Caspar Maynell, and upon the register was found the name of Borden Branch.

This part Dumont jotted down, for Buck had said that the latter was a man who was mining somewhere in the mountains, had carried gold in quantities away by the coach, and had secured letters addressed to B. Borden as well as Borden Branch.

"A number had come to the latter address, but several were then in the office for B. Borden."

Upon looking at the latter Edgar Dumont recognized the writing of the governess, Cara Maynell.

Then he came to the conclusion that B. Borden and Borden Branch were one and the same person.

Buck then remembered that a miner named Larry, dwelling in another camp, had spoken of a man who had a paying mine back in the mountains.

So the detective, armed with these facts, sought Larry, got the locality of the stranger's mine from him, and set out to find it.

Just ten days after, Dumont was about to go into camp one night, as it was growing dark, when he heard the neigh of a horse.

He checked his own animal from answering it, but, going in the direction from whence the sound had come, found three animals in a canyon, the entrance to which had been barred by saplings cut down and made into a rude fence.

He crept cautiously forward, and soon came in view of a small cabin.

He heard voices within, and, revolver in hand, slipped up to the door and listened.

What he heard seemed to reassure him, for, after some little time, he knocked at the door.

Silence at once reigned within for a moment; then came the demand in a stern voice:

"Well, who is there?"

"A friend. I saw your light and came here to find quarters for the night," was the response.

The door suddenly opened, but no one within was visible, and a stern voice said:

"Step in, friend!"

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE MAN OF MYSTERY.

THE young detective boldly stepped into the cabin.

He had replaced his pistol in his belt and thus was at the mercy of those within, who were concealed from his view.

"Who are you?" asked a man, closing the door and confronting him.

"My name is Edgar Dumont—a New York detective, seeking one B. Borden or Borden Branch, which ever name suits best. Are you the man?" and the detective looked the man he addressed fully in the face.

"No, I am not the one you seek."

"But I am, for my name is Borden Branch."

"What do you wish with me?" and Borden Branch stepped from behind the cover of the large chimney place.

"I come, sir, from one who received a letter from you, some time ago, and not again hearing from you, as you had promised she should, sent me to find you."

"Ah! you refer to Mrs. Maynell?"

"I refer to Miss Cara Maynell, sir; but, you look ill."

"That is why Mrs. Maynell has not heard

from me, sir, for I have been badly wounded, and, but for this gentleman, Mr. Rockford, would have died.

"Only to-night we were arranging for him to go to Gold Dust City and send a letter to Mrs. Maynell, and get letters that must be there for me from her."

"There are letters there for you, Mr. Borden—"

"My name, sir, is Borden Branch, and I signed it differently in writing to Mrs. Maynell, for reasons I do not care to make known."

The detective smiled, but said pleasantly:

"I am glad to meet you, Mr. Branch, and especially to know that you are not dead, as we all feared, after your letter referring to the fate of Mr. Maynell and Mr. Delorme."

"And I am glad to meet you, sir, and can assure you that you have accomplished a wonderful feat in finding me here as you have."

"You are mounted, of course, and not alone?"

"I am alone, sir, and my horse is not far away."

"Your name, please?"

"Edgar Dumont."

"Permit me to present my friend, Mr. Rockford, who, as I am not very strong, will show you where to put your horse, and we will have supper for you."

"I found your corral by the neigbing of one of your horses, so if Mr. Rockford will kindly find me something to eat, I'll put my horse in the corral and soon return."

This he did, and, after a hearty supper, the young detective told the story of his having been engaged to find the "Man of Mystery," who seemed to be in possession of the Maynell-Delorme Mine, and related his numerous adventures while tracking him to his lair.

Having heard all, and congratulated the young detective upon his secret-service work, Borden Branch said:

"I notice that you refer to Mrs. Maynell, as Miss Maynell?"

"Yes, for she is Miss Maynell."

"No, she surely married her cousin, Calvin Maynell?"

"No, she expected to marry him, but the very evening of the day they were to be married, he committed suicide."

"My God! can this be true?" and Borden Branch sprung to his feet.

"Mr. Branch, it is the duty of a detective to be thoroughly posted, so my chief, when sending me on this trail, had not time to look up the record of our fair employer; but he did so after my departure and a letter followed me to Gold-Dust City."

"His letter stated that Miss Maynell had been engaged to an army officer, to whom she was devotedly attached, but her father needed money to tide him over, and forced her, in order to save him from ruin, to say she would marry her cousin, who was supposed to be very rich."

"She made the sacrifice, wrote a dismissal to her soldier lover, and the day was set for her marriage; but her cousin, Calvin Maynell, had squandered his wealth, committed forgery to tide over until he married his supposed to be rich cousin, and the officers came to arrest him the day of his marriage, as his crime was discovered. That disgrace caused him to blow out his brains."

"It was known that the officer she was engaged to had resigned and gone abroad, and the papers even had the report of Miss Maynell's marriage to her cousin."

"Her father failed, and in despair, left his daughter to earn her own living, while he came west."

"You, sir, know the rest, as also who was the army officer to whom Miss Maynell was engaged."

"You see I have followed my trail to the end, Captain Branch."

"God bless you!" was the only reply that Borden Branch made.

Need the reader be told that the finding of Borden Branch, the Man of Mystery, by Edgar Dumont, in the end brought together two loving hearts, and that with pretty Allene St. John it was a case of love at first sight for the handsome young detective—a love that was so sincerely returned that in years after she became the bride of the Texan, whose adventures, before he won his bride, would make a most exciting romance.

I think, too, the reader has surmised that true love ran smoothly in those two cases, and so I need only add that Roy Rockford, one time the Vagabond of the Mines, cared not to go East, but remaining on the frontier also became a Man of Mystery to all who crossed his trail.

THE END.

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